NATION

Drug addiction a quasi-pandemic: Bombay HC

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Sensex jumps 740 pts, Nifty breaks 10-day losing streak

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

NZ beat SA by 50 runs, to face India in summit clash

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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TRUMP IMPOSES TARIFFS ON INDIA

The tariffs will come into effect from 2 April

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 5 MARCH

In his first address to Congress since being re-elected, US President Donald Trump slammed high tariffs imposed by India and other nations, describing them as "very unfair." Trump announced that from 2 April, his administration will impose reciprocal tariffs on countries that charge high levies on American goods.

"We've been ripped off for decades by nearly every country on earth, and we will not let that happen any longer," Trump said, highlighting the disparity in tariffs. He pointed out that India, China, Brazil, Mexico, and Canada impose far higher tariffs on US products than the US does on theirs. "India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 per cent," Trump claimed.

Trump's comments followed previous remarks in February, when he indicated that reciprocal tariffs would soon be imposed on countries like India and China. He reinforced his position, stating that if countries tax US goods, the US would respond in kind, including with non-monetary barriers where necessary.

Regarding South Korea, Trump highlighted the significant tariff gap, with South Korea's tariffs on US products being four times higher than the US's tariffs. He also criticised Mexico and Canada for allowing fentanyl to enter the US and benefiting from US subsidies. "We will not be doing that any longer," Trump added, noting the US's large trade deficits with both nations.

In retaliation, Canada has announced 25 per cent tariffs on USD 30 billion worth of US goods starting 4 March, while Mexico and China are expected to impose their own tariffs soon. Trump had previously labelled India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser," particularly targeting high tariffs on US cars, which make it nearly impossible for US manufacturers to compete in India.

The US trade deficit with India stood at USD 45.7 billion in 2024, prompting trade talks led by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal in Washington.

Trump pledged to build a 'Golden Dome' missile defence system on the lines of Israel's Iron Dome.

He asked Congress to fund the cause to protect the homeland. —*PTI*

Donald Trump holds up a signed executive order as he addresses a Congress at the Capitol in Washington **PHOTO: PTI**

RUSSIA, US TO DISCUSS IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

MOSCOW, 5 MARCH

The Kremlin said on Wednesday that future talks between Russia and the United States would include discussions on Iran's nuclear programme. It said the subject had been touched upon last moth during an initial round of US-Russia talks. The Kremlin said that the subject of Iran was touched upon during Russia-U.S. talks in Saudi Arabia last month. "It was touched upon in Riyadh," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "But not in detail."

Media reports on Tuesday claimed that Russia had agreed to assist US President Donald Trump's administration in communicating with Iran on various issues, including the middle-eastern country's nuclear programme and its alleged support for anti-US proxies. The Kremlin however did not confirm if this particular subject will be addressed when discussing Iran. "So far there is only an understanding that the Russian position really is that this problem of Iran's nuclear dossier should be solved exclusively by peaceful political and diplomatic means," Peskov added.

Trump last month resorted to a 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran, aiming to reduce its oil exports down to zero to stop Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. —*Agencies*

BURNING THE ANGER

Several farmers heading towards Chandigarh for a 'sit-in' protest to press for fulfilment of their demands were on Wednesday detained and stopped at different parts of Punjab by the police. Members of farmer groups burned effigies of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann to express their resentment **PHOTO: PTI** >>>More on Page 3

Amit Shah to visit Bengaluru on 7 March

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will visit Bengaluru on 7 March for the inauguration of a hospital, BJP state president B Y Vijayendra said on Wednesday. According to him, Shah will be coming to the city from Tamil Nadu. "Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be visiting Karnataka on 7 March. He is coming to Bengaluru from Tamil Nadu. He will inaugurate a hospital set up by Vishwateertha Mahaswami at Nelamangala. He is not coming here for any political event," Vijayendra told reporters. —*PTI*

AI fires pilot after whistleblower's allegations

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Air India on Wednesday said it has terminated the services of a trainer pilot for lapses and 10 pilots who underwent training under the trainer pilot have been removed from flying duties pending investigation. The latest action came after a whistleblower alleged that a simulator trainer pilot had failed to properly discharge his duties during recurrent simulator training for pilots. The Tata Group-owned airline said a detailed probe was conducted into the allegations, which were corroborated after a review of the evidence. Further, Air India said it voluntarily reported the matter to aviation regulator DGCA and also commended the whistleblower for stepping forward. Details about the trainer pilot and related action could not be immediately ascertained. —*PTI*

Panel seeks reports from telecom on spectrum surrender

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

A parliamentary committee has sought a factual note from the Ministry of Communications on reports that its department of telecommunications allowed the surrender of spectrum acquired in auctions by telecom companies before 2022, sources said. In its communication to the ministry, the committee headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey referred to observations in Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) about the 'lack of due diligence in auction of spectrum for Broadband Wireless Access (BWA) services'. The CAG had observed that the Notice Inviting Applications for the BWA auction suffered from deficiencies in scope of usage of spectrum for different class of licensees. Citing the CAG and reports claiming that the department of telecommunications allowed the surrender of spectrum acquired in auctions by telecom companies, the panel has sought a factual note from the ministry. —*PTI*

Stop delimitation for 30 yrs: Stalin

CHENNAI, 5 MARCH

Stepping up the pressure on Centre, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday proposed that the 1971 Census be the basis for delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies for 30 years starting 2026 and favoured a Joint Action Committee (JAC) involving all southern states to press for related demands.

At an all-party meeting on delimitation that was attended by main opposition AIADMK among others, Stalin, moving a resolution, said that in the event of increase in the number of seats in Parliament, the 1971 Census should be the basis for it and that appropriate Constitutional amendment should be done.

The CM said that the all-party meeting is for understanding that the state has been pushed to a corner on the issue of delimitation, thereby prompting it to take up a struggle movement to secure its rights. "The delimitation sword is hanging over the head of south India and Tamil Nadu will be severely affected," Stalin said.

MK Stalin **PHOTO: PTI**

The JAC is to take forward such demands and raise awareness among the people and the meet unanimously opposed delimitation exercise based on population, which will be a "threat to federalism and the rights of southern states to political representation." Tamil Nadu's present representational percentage in Parliament, which is 7.18, should not be changed under any circumstances. The meet underscored that Tamil Nadu is not against delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies. However, the proposed exercise must not become a punishment for implementing well the socio-economic welfare measures during the past 50 years. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Milk price hike in Karnataka soon; CM to take a call

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Bowing to demands from farmers and milk producer unions, the Karnataka government has agreed to increase milk prices, Animal Husbandry Minister K Venkatesh informed the Legislative Council on Wednesday. While the exact hike is yet to be decided, the final decision will be taken by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah soon.

Farmers are demanding a Rs10 per litre increase, citing rising production costs. Currently, milk is priced at Rs 44 per litre after a Rs 3 hike in August last year.

He said the government owes Rs 613.5 crore for the period between October 2023 and February 2024 as pending incentives to dairy farmers, . A total of Rs 656 crore is due to 90.04 lakh beneficiaries. Venkatesh blamed insufficient allocation and increased milk production for the delayed payments, adding that Rs 700 crore in dues were left unpaid by the previous BJP government. —*Salar News*

Split BBMP into 7 corps: Panel

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

The new proposal to solve the chaotic civic governance of the bustling metropolis has recommended restructuring the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) by splitting it into a maximum of seven city corporations in the Greater Bengaluru Area.

The joint select 13-member committee of the Karnataka legislature headed by Congress MLA Rizwan Arshad, tasked with reviewing the 'Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024', tabled the report in the Assembly on Wednesday. The report pointed out that the city's population had doubled to 1.5 crore since the time the BBMP was established in 2008, forcing the need for the constitution of a Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) for coordination and supervision with and 30 months terms for the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor.

According to the report, each city corporation should cover a population not less than 10 lakh, and the population density should be 5,000 inhabitants per square kilometre.

The report highlighted the current situation where BBMP and other agencies like Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM), Metro and others are all functioning in silos, without any coordination.

"There is centralisation of power in BBMP, there is no transparency, and there is corruption. There is a need for decentralisation of powers, if it doesn't happen it will lead to corruption and it won't be possible to provide good, transparent and effective administration. So, we have recommended restructuring of BBMP into various corporations. We have also made a recommendation regarding the tenure of the Mayor, for coordination at all levels between agencies," Arshad said. The report has also recommended that GBA will be headed by Chief Minister as ex-officio chairperson and minister in charge of development of Bengaluru would be ex-officio vice chairman.

A meeting would be convened once every three months. —*PTI*

RSS to hold top body meeting in Bengaluru to 'awaken Hindus'

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

An analysis of the prevailing scenario in the country, including the issue of "Hindu awakening", is on the agenda of a three-day meeting of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest decision-making body of the RSS, that is scheduled to begin in Bengaluru from 21-23 March. The meeting will also prepare a framework of various programmes and campaigns to be taken up this year and review the progress made on the work that was expected to be completed in the run-up to the centenary year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the organisation said in a statement. RSS will complete 100 years of its foundation on Vijayadashami (Dasara) this year. —*PTI*

10-year-old girl gangraped in Anekal, 2 minors held

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

A 10-year-old girl was raped by two minor boys in the Anekal area of Bengaluru's rural district on 3 March, as per police officials.

According to the preliminary probe, the incident occurred when the girl was on the way home after school in the afternoon. First, a local identified as Kiran, 17, allegedly engaged the girl in conversation and distracted her. Later, his friend Prajwal, 16, arrived, and together the duo threatened her with a knife before they allegedly forced her into a home where she was gangraped.

The accused allegedly tortured the minor with cigarette buds.

A case was filed after the minor disclosed the ordeal to her family.

The police took cognizance of the case when the minor's family reached out to the child protection office, following which a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, along with relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

The police's prompt action led to the arrest of both suspects.

The girl is currently receiving treatment.

Recently, a constable from Bengaluru's Bommanahalli police station was arrested for sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl. She and her mother had earlier approached the police in December to file a case against another boy, reportedly her boyfriend. —*Salar News*

OVERRIDE ACCESS CODES

New IT Bill to allow tax officials to access emails, social media

PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Starting from April, 2026, the new IT Bill proposes allow tax authorities to access private emails, social media accounts and online financial platforms if they someone of hiding assets.

Under the proposed Income Tax Bill 2025, if a tax officer suspects someone of hiding income or assets, they will be able to override access codes and directly enter digital spaces to gather information.

Section 247 of the new Income Tax bill however changes this provision, allowing designated income tax officers rights to mails, social media, bank details, and investment accounts if they have grounds to suspect tax evasion.

Rajarshi Dasgupta, Executive Director-Tax, AQUILA said Section 247 of the IT Bill allows official to "Break open the lock of any door, box, locker, safe, almirah, or other receptacle to enter and search any building, place, etc., where the keys thereof or the access to such building, place, etc., is not available, or gain access by overriding the access code to any said computer system, or virtual digital space, where the access code thereof is not available."

The concept of a virtual digital space is new addition to the bill. It was hitherto undefined in the previous Income Tax Act. The bill therefore powers tax officers to enter places of business and access virtual digital spaces.

Under the current IT Act, officials can break into physical spaces, such as lockers or safes if access was unavailable. Officials could request laptops, but because the tax law doesn't explicitly mention digital records, such demands faced legal pushbacks. —*Agencies*

PHOTO: X

Debt-ridden farmer dies by suicide in Hunsur

MYSURU, 5 MARCH

A 75-year-old farmer, Chandraiah, took his own life in Kattemalalavadi, Hunsur taluk, due to mounting debt. His body was discovered in a local lake on Wednesday. Chandraiah, a farmer, had borrowed approximately Rs 6 lakh from a nationalised bank and private lenders. The situation was exacerbated by his two sons' deteriorating health, which prevented them from working. A bank notice demanding loan repayment reportedly pushed him into severe depression, leading to his suicide by drowning. Hunsur Rural Police have registered a case, and revenue department officials have visited the village. *—Salar News*

Lokayukta nets two officers taking bribe

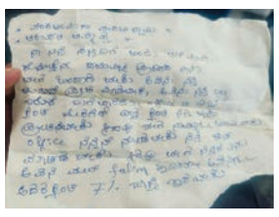
KALABURAGI, 5 MARCH

Two revenue officers were caught red-handed by the Lokayukta police while accepting a bribe of Rs 30,000 at the deputy tahsildar's office in Kalaburagi taluk, officials said on Wednesday. The arrested officials have been identified as Melkunda (B) Village Officer VA Kantesh and his colleague Akhtar Patel. Sources said they had demanded a bribe from a person named Siddaramaiah Hiremath for processing mutation and name inclusion in revenue records. On being informed, officials under the leadership of Kalaburagi Lokayukta SP BK Umesh laid the trap. The team included Inspector Akkamahadevi and officers Mallinath Ranjoji, Basavaraj, Aslam, Yamanurappa and Paimoddin. *—Salar News*

Mother ends life with 3 children in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 5 MARCH

Unable to resist the torture of her husband, a woman in Belagavi taluk ended her life after killing her three children by throwing them into Krishna river late night on Tuesday. Police identified the deceased as Sharada and her children Adarsh, Ambruta and Anushka. Onlookers tried to save them, but except Anushka, all three of them died before they could be rescued. Anusha died during treatment at the government hospital in Raibag. Police confirmed that Sharada took the drastic step unable to tolerate harassment by her husband Ashok. *—Salar News*



Girl writes to God for boy's love

KOLAR, 5 MARCH

The Muzarai department authorities found a letter in the hundi of Sri Venkataramanaswamy temple at Chikkatirupathi in Malur taluk of Kolar district, purportedly written by a girl, seeking the blessings of the almighty for her love affair. It appears that the boy is unaware of the girl's emotions, as she wrote to God to make him look towards her in the office, where they seem to be working together. The girl has also promised to God that she would tonsure her head if she and the boy unite. The girl also wanted the boy to have the same feelings towards her, and it should be "seven per cent more than her feelings". Besides the letter, hundi contained over 49 lakh cash, some foreign currency notes and an undeclared quantity of gold. *—Salar News*

Ahead of Budget, activists urge for better City infra

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

As Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is set to present his 16th state budget on 7 March, all sectors are keenly waiting for allocations to carry out developmental works.

With the budget is expected to exceed Rs 4 lakh crore, civic experts are voicing strong opposition to large-scale infrastructure projects such as tunnel roads and flyovers. Instead, they urge the government to accord priority to public transport and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to address Bengaluru's traffic congestion.

Sandeep Aniruddhan, founder and convener of Citizens Agenda in Bengaluru, criticised the government's approach, calling budget allocations for new projects as "bad behavior" that fuels unplanned urban expansion.

"No funds should be allocated for new infrastructure projects unless the city empowers the Metropolitan Planning Committee and the Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) to formulate a master plan. Until then, funds should only be used for maintaining existing infrastructure. Otherwise, no real improvement will happen," Aniruddhan said.

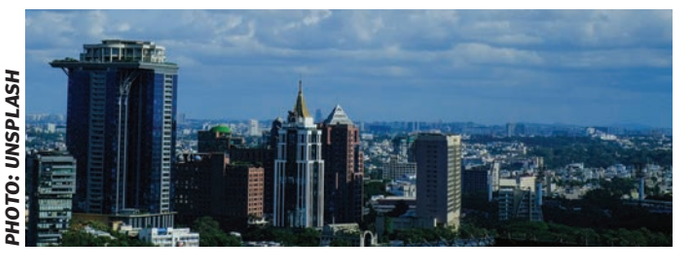


PHOTO: UNSPLASH

In the run up to the Union Budget, the State government had sought Rs 75,000 crore from the Union Finance Ministry for infrastructure development. Aniruddhan questioned the need for such projects when Bengaluru's existing infrastructure is in disrepair.

"It's unfortunate that the government keeps promoting grand but poorly planned schemes while the city's roads are riddled with potholes and encroachment. There is no last-mile connectivity to mass transit, the suburban rail project has been delayed by 45 years and the metro is inefficient due to the absence of a master plan. We don't have enough buses," he said.

Raj Dugar, Convenor of Citizens for Citizens, said, "To reduce traffic congestion, the government must act swiftly on three key aspects of public transport: double the number of buses and introduce efficient feeder services, expedite pending Metro projects while reversing fare hikes and fast-track all four corridors of the Bengaluru Suburban Rail Project, extending them to nearby towns," Dugar said.

He also emphasised on the need to improve walkways, cycling infrastructure and traffic management to free up roads.

"Connectivity between Bengaluru and all district headquarters in Karnataka must be enhanced to ensure balanced regional development," he added. *—Salar News*

Cong to keep 4% govt contracts for Muslims: BJP

BJP urges people to teach CM a lesson for minority appeasement

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

The BJP on Wednesday alleged that the ruling Congress in Karnataka was planning to introduce a four per cent reservation for Muslims in government contracts.

When all the development work across the state have come to a halt, the ruling Congress has decided to present before the Cabinet a proposal to give four per cent reservation in government contracts to minorities, BJP state president BY Vijayendra claimed.

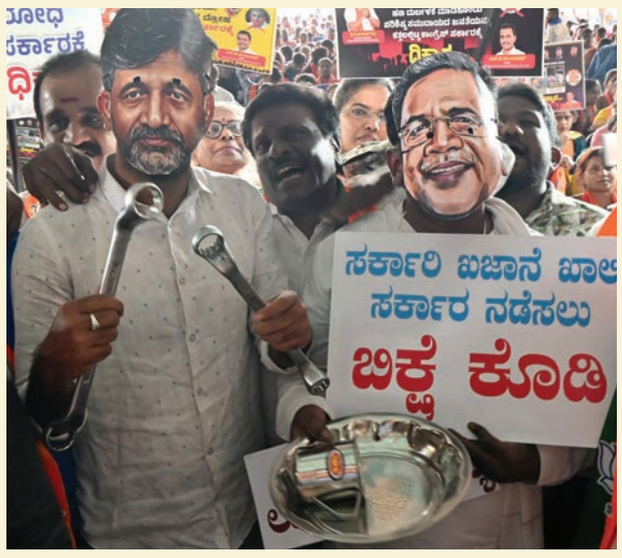
He questioned why minority is always referred to as Muslims when there are many other communities in the country.

"Should minority mean only Muslims and not anyone else? The minority appeasement policies of the Congress will create disturbance in society," Vijayendra told reporters here.

If Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is truly a leader of backward communities as he has been trying to project himself as the one, then he should bring policies to empower them, he said.

Vijayendra appealed to the people to teach Siddaramaiah a lesson for his minority appeasement policy.

Vijayapura MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal said the Congress government in Karnataka is entirely focusing on minority appeasement. These kind of reservations are anti-Constitution. *—PTI*



BJP leaders protest against the State government alleging the government has misused SCSP-TSP Money, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BIDAR APMC SEEKS 80 ACRES OF LAND

BIDAR, 5 MARCH

Minister of Agricultural Marketing Shivananda Patil on Tuesday informed the Legislative Council that the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) secretary has written to the deputy commissioner, requesting allocation of 60 to 80 acres of government land to it. Responding to a question posed by MLC Bhimrao Patil, the minister said that the Bidar APMC at present possesses 39 acres and 28 guntas of land, with essential infrastructure already in place. However, due to space constraints for further expansion of APMC activities, a request has been made for 80 acres, he said. *—Salar News*

BJP QUESTIONS WAY NAXALITES SURRENDERED

Casting aspersions over the way Naxalites (Maoists) gave up their arms and pledged to abide by the constitution in the state a week after the CM's tweet, opposition BJP on Wednesday alleged due process was not followed by the Government in the surrender.

During the discussion on the Governor's speech, BJP MLA V Sunil Kumar said Naxalites killed several people. People living in the Malnad and coastal region live in fear. Policemen carried out several combing operations, but they could not locate the Naxalites. Several warnings could not deter them and make them surrender, the former minister said.

But soon after a tweet by the chief minister, Naxalites surrendered and the state was declared Naxal-free.

Meanwhile, referring to riots in Udayagiri police station and daylight robbery in Bidar and Mangaluru, he also questioned the Congress government's claims over the law and order situation in the State. *—PTI*

'PROFESSIONAL DISPUTE'

IPS officers' clash ends in transfer

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Two days after IPS officer Vartika Katiyar was transferred after she complained against Inspector General of Police (Internal Security Division) D Roopa Moudgil, the state government also transferred the latter on Wednesday.

Moudgil, has now been posted as the managing director of Karnataka Silk Marketing Board Limited.

The two senior women officers were transferred after Katiyar complained against Moudgil on 20 February, accusing her of using police personnel to plant confidential documents related to other departments in her chamber.

Katiyar was transferred and posted as deputy inspector general of police and additional commandant general of home guards and ex-officio additional director of civil defence, Bengaluru, on 3 March.

The controversy began when Katiyar accused Moudgil of "orchestrating" unauthorised access to her chamber to plant confidential files. Moudgil's office dismissed the allegations as baseless, saying that Katiyar has a history of making unfounded claims.

To support their argument, Moudgil's office cited an email sent on 28 February by Katiyar's husband Niteen Subhash Yeola, an IFS officer, to the Chief Secretary of Karnataka. **Salar News** has the email.

In the email, Yeola accused Katiyar of misusing her authority and filing an FIR against him, accusing him of an acid attack. He said she pressured and threatened subordinate officials to register the FIR.

D Roopa Moudgil and Vartika Katiyar **PHOTOS: X**

In response, Katiyar's office said that this is a professional dispute and her personal life is being unfairly dragged into the matter. They said that Moudgil contacted Yeola, urging him to write to the Karnataka government and highlight legal cases against his wife, which is sub judice.

According to Katiyar, this move was an attempt to divert attention from the original complaint and bring her personal affairs into the public domain. She said that while a court injunction prohibits Yeola from disclosing personal matters publicly, Moudgil was collaborating with him to defame her.

Moudgil's office also suggested that tensions between the two officers escalated after Moudgil was given charge of the anti-Naxal force, which was previously under Katiyar. They pointed out that under her leadership, the unit successfully ambushed Naxalite leader Varun Gowda in November 2024, potentially fuelling resentment from Katiyar. *—Salar News*

GOLD WORTH RS 14.62 CR SEIZED FROM KANNADA ACTRESS: DRI

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore were seized from Kannada actress Ranya Rao at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA), following which searches were conducted at her residence and gold jewellery worth Rs 2.06 crore and Indian currency amounting to Rs 2.67 crore were also recovered, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) said on Wednesday.

Rao is the stepdaughter of senior IPS officer Ramachandra Rao. The DGP-rank officer is currently serving as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd, he added.

The total seizure in the case stood at Rs 17.29 crore, including assets worth Rs 4.73 crore, marking a significant blow to organised gold smuggling networks.

According to DRI officials, the 14.2 kg haul is one of the largest gold seizures at Bengaluru airport in recent times.

In a statement, the Ministry of Finance said the DRI successfully intercepted a passenger carrying foreign-origin gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore at KIA. *—PTI*

Govt to reclaim 444 acres from IAF

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Wednesday directed officials to reclaim 444.12 acres of forest land currently held by the Indian Air Force in the Peenya plantation and Jarakabande reserved forest area of Bengaluru as per the rules.

Of the 570 acres allotted to the Air Force in 1987, the government had issued an order in 2017, cancelling the sanction of 452 acres, which was notified as forest, he said.

"However, the Indian Air Force had started construction work illegally on 1 March without obtaining FC (Forest Clearance) permission," the Minister said in a statement.

As per the government order of 2017, mutation has been completed, and this land is now officially registered as reserved forest in the title deed. The Forest department has brought this issue to the notice of Air Force officials and has also put up a board marking it as a reserved forest. A letter has also been written to the Ministry of Defense seeking clearance of this forest land, he said.

PHOTO: PTI

The officials have stated that Air force had continued construction of an office and other facilities and were conducting training on about 15 of the 444 acres of land despite knowing it is illegal. "Khandre suggested that legal action be taken immediately to take possession of the forest land and to apply as per the rules on the Parivesh portal regarding the land being used by the Air Force and write a letter to the Air Force to obtain FC," the statement added. *—PTI*

2 BMTC workers to represent India in Qatar Kabaddi games

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation on Wednesday announced that two of its employees have been selected to represent Team India in the Qatar International Kabaddi Championship 2025.

The tournament will be held in Doha, Qatar, from 13 March to 17 March.

According to BMTC, Vinay Kumar V and Y D Shashidhar, both serving as conductors, will be participating in the tournament.

"BMTC remains committed to supporting and encouraging its employees in their training and participation in the championship," the statement said. *—PTI*

VILLAGERS FUME

3 taluks await fire stations for almost 7 yrs

YOHAN P HONNADDI
YADGIR, 5 MARCH

The government formed new taluks by separating Gurmatkal from Yadgir, Vadagera from Shahapur and Hunasagi from Surpur around eight years ago, but the new ones are yet to get fire stations, said local residents.

If a fire accident occurs in a remote village of these new taluks, by the time a fire truck arrives from the old taluk headquarters, the fire would have already done the damage, they said.

While Shahapur is 33km away from Vadagera, Yadgir is 40km from Gurmatkal and Surpur is 35km from Hunasagi.

According to norms, there should be a fire station within every 40km.

Surpur and Hunasagi share a single fire station, and it has only one fire-truck. To reach remote villages like Narayanpur, the fire truck has to travel 70km.

If a fire breaks out in Vadagera, fire services need to be called from either Yadgir or Shahapur **PHOTO: SALAR**

A site was once identified in Gurmatkal taluk to set up a fire station, but the work never began.

In Hunasagi, there is a shortage of government land. Although KBJNL land is available, it is near a hill, making access difficult.

Previously, the district had seven fire trucks for three fire stations. However, after fire trucks older than 15 years were decommissioned, only three are left.

District Fire Officer Veeresh Ukkadaka said, "Fire trucks older than 15 years cannot be used as per central government orders. Currently, only one truck operates in each of the three taluks."

If a fire breaks out in Vadagera, fire services need to be called from either Yadgir or Shahapur – both about 60km away. Mailarappa, Resident of Hayyal (B), said, "Despite being a taluk for many years, Vadagera has not yet been sanctioned a fire station."

Karave Activist Sharanu Itagi blamed the local MLA for the situation. "The absence of a fire station in Vadagera highlights the failure of elected representatives. The local MLAs must take immediate action."

Sanju Alegar, a social worker in Gurmatkal, said, "There have been several incidents where the fire truck has arrived after the fire has already died down. Establishing a local fire station is necessary." Gurmatkal Tahsildar Shantagouda Biradar said, "A site for the fire station has already been identified. Work will begin once government approves funds." *—Salar News*

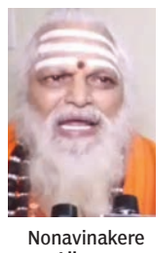
DKS will be CM soon: Seers

YADGIR, 5 MARCH

- The seer at Kodi Math also spoke about a change of chief minister. He said in Yadgir, "The power in this state belongs to the Halumatha community"

Amid growing discussions about a possible change of chief minister, many religious leaders have said Shivakumar would ascent to the position.

Nonnavinakere Ajjayya Swamy on Wednesday said at the Vishwaradhya Math in Abbetumakur, "Everyone wishes that DK Shivakumar becomes the chief minister. With the collective will of the people and the blessings of this Math, he will surely attain the position. I cannot predict the exact day. I have also visited the sacred seat of Vishwaradhya in Abbetumakur. May DK Shivakumar receive the blessings of the deity," said Ajjayya Swamy.



Nonavinakere Ajjayya Swamiji **PHOTO: SALAR**

"Soon, DK Shivakumar shall be a manifested king. He will become the chief minister according to the wishes of the people," he said.

Bhairavi Amma, another revered figure, said in Hubballi, "DK Shivakumar will become the chief minister. It could even happen tomorrow. I guarantee that he will assume the position during this term. Three years ago, I told him about someone else eating away the wealth he worked hard for, and today, he understands its meaning."

The seer at Kodi Math also spoke about a change of chief minister. He said in Yadgir, "The power in this state belongs to the Halumatha community. Siddaramaiah must step down voluntarily. Forcing him out will not be easy. I will reveal what happens next after Ugadi." *—Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

'Mangalsurtra' remarks have come true: Kharge to PM

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over rise in gold loans and said his remarks during the Lok Sabha polls campaign about 'stealing of mangalsutras' have come true. He said women are forced to mortgage their gold ornaments under his rule. "Narendra Modi, you had talked about 'stealing of mangalsutras'. That has now come true. In your rule, women have been forced to mortgage their gold ornaments. First you made women's 'stri-dhan' disappear by implementing demonetization, now due to inflation and falling household savings, they are forced to mortgage their most valuable thing -- their jewelery," Kharge said on X. Kharge claimed that between 2019 and 2024, four crore women mortgaged their gold and took a loan of Rs 4.7 lakh crore. *—PTI*

UP Assembly bans gutkha, pan; imposes Rs 1K fine

LUCKNOW, 5 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana on Wednesday announced a ban on gutkha and pan masala within the Assembly premises. The announcement comes a day after Mahana expressed his displeasure over an incident where a member was caught on camera spitting pan inside the Assembly premises during the House proceedings on Tuesday morning. Expressing strong disapproval, the speaker had reminded all members of their responsibility towards cleanliness as lawmakers elected by the public. After the Question Hour, Mahana announced, "With immediate effect, the use of pan masala and gutkha is banned inside the Assembly premises. Anyone, including employees, officials or any other individuals, found consuming gutkha or pan masala within the Assembly premises will be fined Rs 1,000." he added. *—PTI*

144 Gujarat fishermen stuck in Pak jails: Govt

GANDHINAGAR, 5 MARCH

A total of 144 fishermen from Gujarat are currently languishing in Pakistani jails, and 22 of them were arrested by the neighbouring country in the last two years, the Gujurat government told the legislative assembly on Wednesday. "Of the 144 fishermen, a total of 22 fishermen were caught by Pakistan in two years -- nine in 2023 and 13 in 2024," State Fisheries Minister Raghavji Patel said. The minister added that Pakistan had released 432 Indian fishermen in the last two years, while 144 remained custody as of January 2025. He noted that as many as 1,173 fishing boats from India are in Pakistani possession as of December 2024 with none returned in the last two years. *—PTI*

FIR registered over video threatening to blow up UP CM

BASTI, 5 MARCH

An FIR has been registered against a person for allegedly posting a video threatening to blow up Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, police said on Wednesday. The FIR was registered at the Gaur police station following a complaint by Abhishek Dubey, the admin of Whatsapp group "Sanatan Dharma Sarvopari", on Tuesday after a member of the group posted the alleged video, police said. The FIR was registered under sections 353 (1) (statement conducing public mischief), 351 (4) (criminal intimidation) and 66 of the IT Act. SHO Dharmendra Singh said police was trying to trace the accused. *—PTI*

Delimitation: Annamalai dubs all-party meet unwarranted

Kamal Haasan slams Centre, says they want to create 'Hindia'

CHENNAI, 5 MARCH

Responding, to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's all-party meeting, BJP state unit chief K Annamalai wondered why there was an opposition to delimitation.

He reiterated that Centre has clarified no state would be affected due to delimitation.

He asked whether Stalin held such a political grudge against the BJP that he skipped over AB Vajpayee's name while referring to the deferment in 2001 of delimitation for 25 more years. Annamalai termed the Stalin's Joint Action Committee proposal to involve all the southern states as unwarranted.

Even after it was said that Tamil Nadu may even get more MPs, what was the issue, Annamalai asked, pointing to the 30-year freeze batted by the all-party meeting.

Makkal Needhi Maiam President Kamal Haasan sharply criticised the Union government's push for parliamentary constituency delimitation, warning that it could undermine India's federal structure and diversity. Speaking at the All-Party Meeting on the issue, Haasan emphasised that the move threatens the inclusive vision for India by promoting a homogenised "Hindia."

BJP state unit chief K Annamalai PHOTO: PTI

The AIADMK, the Congress and Left parties, actor-politician Vijay's TVK, Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan among others attended the meeting which was boycotted by the BJP, Tamil nationalist Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) and former union minister GK Vasan's Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar).

Recently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said the delimitation exercise will not affect southern states, including Tamil Nadu, and had accused Stalin of spreading a misinformation campaign on the matter.

He had asserted no southern state would see a reduction in the Parliamentary representation if delimitation was done on pro-rata basis.

The DMK had questioned this assertion as well, asking the basis for pro rata--whether on population or the existing constituency of MP or MLAS. CMs of two other southern states--Siddaramaiah and A Revanth Reddy of Congress-ruled Karnataka and Telangana, respectively, have also questioned Shah over his assertion on delimitation.

Annamalai also launched a signature campaign supporting the 3-language policy of NEP 2020. "Why does the DMK regime implement 2-language policy only in government schools," one of the slogans asked. *—PTI*

'UNREASONABLE DESIRE'

Andhra Speaker rejects Jagan's demand for LoP status

AMARAVATI, 5 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Speaker C Ayyannapatrudu on Wednesday said the demand by YSRCP Chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for the Leader of the Opposition status cannot be considered, describing it as an "unreasonable desire."

He emphasised that the party does not have the required 18 MLAs or one-tenth of the total strength in the House.

Ayyannapatrudu further clarified that the recognition of a party leader as the Leader of the Opposition could only be considered if the largest Opposition party meets the minimum requirement of 18 members, and it would be inappropriate to grant such a status solely based on discretion.

Ayyannapatrudu pointed out that the eligibility for such recognition is determined strictly based on constitutional provisions, legal mandates, and established precedents.

Reddy however accused the TDP-led government of "deceiving" the people, claiming that the budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26 reflect the same tactics used by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to "mislead" the public.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy PHOTO: ANI

He mocked Naidu for his pre-election slogan, "Babu Surety Bavishattu (Future Guarantee)," which he said has turned into "Babu Surety Mosam (Cheating) Guarantee."

He emphasised that the NDA manifesto had made 143 promises during the election campaign, but the ruling alliance of TDP, Janasena, and BJP had no answers when questioned about the status of these commitments. *—PTI*

SP MLA Azmi suspended for lauding Aurangzeb

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Asim Azmi was on Wednesday suspended from the Maharashtra legislative assembly till the ongoing budget session ends on March 26, over his remarks eulogising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

Crying injustice, Azmi said the action against him was taken despite him retracting his remark.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked the Samajwadi Party to take a stand on Azmi's remarks, demanding that it must expel him for glorifying the Mughal ruler.

Maharashtra minister Chandrakant Patil moved the motion of suspension of Azmi from the House for the remainder of the session's term.

Members of the treasury benches said Aurangzeb's praise amounted to an insult of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his son Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.

"Azmi's comments praising Aurangzeb and criticizing Sambhaji Maharaj do not suit the stature of a member of the assembly and is an insult of the democratic institution of the legislative assembly," Patil said.

Abu Asim Azmi, Samajwadi Party MLA PHOTO: PTI

> **Suspended despite withdrawing my remark**
>
> -Abu Azmi, SP MLA

Asked about the fight between Aurangzeb and Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, Azmi had termed it a political battle.

His comments rocked both houses of the state legislature on Tuesday, with members of the ruling side demanding his suspension and that he be booked for treason.

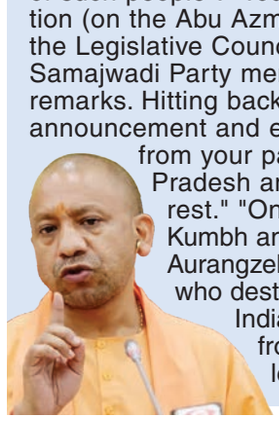
Meanwhile, the first session of 2025 of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly was adjourned indefinitely.

The total time period in the proceedings of the House was 72 hours and 56 minutes. In the session of ten sub-sessions, the time period without adjournment was 69 hours 20 minutes. *—PTI*

Bring Azmi to UP and we'll 'take care': UP CM Yogi Adityanath

Lucknow, 5 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday asked the Samajwadi Party to take a stand on the controversial remarks made by one of its leaders and Maharashtra MLA Abu Azmi, demanding that the party must expel him for glorifying Mughal ruler Aurangzeb. Adityanath also asked the Samajwadi Party (SP) to bring Azmi to UP and said "Uttar Pradesh knows well how to take care of such people". "You (SP) must decide your position (on the Abu Azmi row)," Adityanath said in the Legislative Council following which the Samajwadi Party members started making remarks. Hitting back, he said, "Make an official announcement and expel that wretched person from your party. Then send him to Uttar Pradesh and we will take care of the rest." "On one hand, you criticize the Kumbh and on the other, you glorify Aurangzeb -- a ruthless, fanatical ruler who destroyed temples and crushed India's faith. What is stopping you from taking action against this leader?" he asked. *—PTI*



BSP appoints Randhir & Ramji as coordinators

LUCKNOW, 5 MARCH

The Bahujan Samaj Party on Wednesday appointed Ramji Gautam and Randhir Beniwal as its national coordinator after Mayawati's brother and the party's national vice-president Anand Kumar expressed a desire to hold one post at a time.

Kumar was recently appointed the national coordinator but then expressed his wish to hold only one post in the interest of the party.

"Keeping in mind the interests of the party and the movement, Anand Kumar, who has been selflessly serving the BSP for a long time, expressed his wish to work in only one post. His decision is welcome," Mayawati wrote on X.

She said the party expressed confidence that the newly appointed leaders would work with "honesty and dedication".

The BSP supremo last week removed Anand Kumar's son Akash Anand from the party and said there will be no successor to her in the party while she is alive. *—PTI*

Vipassana excuse, addicted to luxury: BJP attacks Kejri

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

BJP launched a scathing attack on AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday, accusing him of using his 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat in Punjab as a pretext to enjoy a lavish lifestyle.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva also claimed that Kejriwal is seeking a Rajya Sabha seat after his party lost the Assembly polls.

He also criticised the high-security arrangements for Kejriwal in Punjab. Responding to concerns over the AAP leader's security, Sachdeva said, "What kind of threat does he have from Khalistani elements with whom he had dined and from whom his party collects money? ."

1,300 tonnes of garbage removed from Yamuna

Meanwhile, Delhi Irrigation and Flood Control Minister Parvesh Verma, inspected the Yamuna by boat on Wednesday and said 1,300 tonnes of garbage had been removed from the river in the past 10 days.

Will work as per our agenda, not AAP's: Delhi CM

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta hit out at AAP, asserting the opposition party cannot dictate her government's agenda while reiterating BJP dispensation's commitment to fulfilling its poll promises.

AAP workers put up posters on a flyover in Delhi with the message "only three more days", over its "promise" to roll out Rs 2,500 monthly financial assistance to women by 8 March. *—PTI*

'MARTYRS' ROW: BJP WALKS OUT OFF J&K ASSEMBLY

JAMMU, 5 MARCH

BJP on Wednesday walked out of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly here after Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather announced expunging of "derogatory remarks" of the leader of opposition Sunil Sharma about the 13 July, 1931 "martyrs" amid pandemonium in the House.

Sharma made the remarks on the 1931 "martyrs" after PDP legislator Waheed-ur-Rehman Para demanded restoration of the public holiday on 13 July besides the 5 December holiday to mark the birth anniversary of National Conference founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.

Abdul Rahim Rather PHOTO: X

Both the holidays were scrapped by the lieutenant governor-led administration following abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state into two Union territories in August 2019.

Para sought restoration of the two holidays and highlighted the importance of the 13 July, 1931 when 22 men fell to the bullets of Dogra Maharaja's soldiers outside Srinagar central jail and the contribution of the NC founder.

He also demanded passing of a resolution in the House for shifting of prisoners from outside jails to J&K and requested Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to take the issue of property attachment and other strong-arm tactics with the Centre. *—PTI*

PK: Nitish will contest with BJP, but may switch sides

BETTIAH, 5 MARCH

Election strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor on Wednesday claimed that JD(U) president Nitish Kumar will contest the upcoming assembly polls in Bihar in alliance with the BJP but may switch sides later, with hopes for another term as the chief minister.

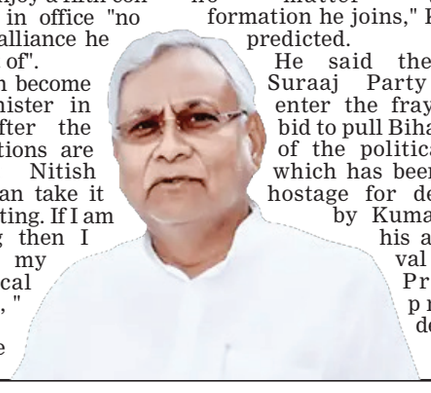
Jan Suraaj Party founder, who was addressing a press conference in West Champaran district, however, also asserted that the 74-year-old leader had grown too unpopular to enjoy a fifth consecutive term in office "no matter which alliance he becomes a part of".

"Anybody can become the chief minister in November, after the assembly elections are over, except Nitish Kumar. You can take it from me in writing. If I am proven wrong then I will give up my own political campaign," Kishor said.

"I challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to declare that Nitish Kumar will be the chief minister for a full five-year term after the elections (if the NDA comes to power). If they do so, the BJP will find it hard to win seats," Kishor said.

"Nitish Kumar may try switching sides after it becomes clear to him that the BJP was not going to back him for another term in office. But the number of seats won by JD(U) would be so dismal that he would not get the top job, no matter which formation he joins," Kishor predicted.

He said the Jan Suraaj Party will enter the fray in a bid to pull Bihar "out of the political rut which has been held hostage for decades by Kumar and his arch-rival Lalu Prasad, president". *—PTI*



RS 3,800 CR LHDCP PROGRAMME

Cabinet nod for supply of generic veterinary medicines

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved changes to the Rs 3,880-crore Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDCP) to include the distribution of high-quality and affordable generic veterinary medicines to farmers.

"A decision related to livestock health has been taken in the Cabinet. ...High-quality medicines will be provided under the Pashu Aushadhi component of the scheme," I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here.

Pashu Aushadhi is the new component added to the LHDCP scheme, an official statement said.

The minister said Pashu Aushadi would be similar to Jan Aushadi Yojana. The generic veterinary medicines will be distributed through PM Kisan Samridhi Kendras and Cooperatives.

Ashwini Vaishnaw PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Vaishnaw said traditional knowledge of veterinary medicines will also be revived and documented as part of the scheme.

The Cabinet approved a provision of Rs 75 crore from the total budget allocation for supplying good quality and affordable generic veterinary medicine and an incentive for sale of medicines under Pashu Aushadhi component.

The scheme has three components - National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP), Livestock Health and Disease Control (LH&DC) and Pashu Aushadhi.

LHDCP focuses on the prevention of diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Brucellosis, Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF), Lumpy Skin Disease, etc, through immunization.

It also supports door-step delivery of livestock health care and improving the availability of generic veterinary medicine. *— PTI*

JU students set deadline for VC to address issues

KOLKATA, 5 MARCH

Protests at Jadavpur University continued for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, with students demanding action against alleged assaults on their peers and set a 4pm deadline for Vice-Chancellor Bhaskar Gupta to address their grievances.

The agitating students warned of intensified protests if Gupta did not turn up on the campus to meet them within the stipulated time.

The students' demands include registering a hit-and-run case against education minister Bratya Basu, whose car allegedly hit Indranuj Roy, a student currently undergoing treatment.

Meanwhile, the Calcutta High Court directed the state government to file a comprehensive report on the incidents that happened during the visit of Education Minister Bratya Basu to Jadavpur University on 1 March. *—PTI*

Cops stop protesting ryots from entering Chandigarh

100s of farmers including SKM leaders detained

CHANDIGARH, 5 MARCH

Punjab police blocked farmers' attempt to go to Chandigarh on the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's call for a week-long dharna beginning on Wednesday, as multiple checkpoints were set up across the state and security stepped up at all entry points of the Union Territory. Farmer leaders claim that hundreds of protesters have been taken into police custody.

The SKM, a conglomerate of more than 30 farmer bodies, had given the call for the sit-in in Chandigarh in support of farmers' various demands including purchase of six crops at minimum support price by the state government.

Chandigarh Superintendent of police Geetanjali Khandelwal said police personnel were deployed at all the border points.

"Barricades have been put up and strict checking is being done," he said.

SKM condemned the AAP government for preventing farmers from raising their voices. SKM leader Raminder Singh Patiala dubbed Punjab government's action against farmers as "undeclared emergency" and said batches of farmers at several places were stopped by police and were detained.

"The Bhagwant Mann government has shown that it is rattled and tried to suppress' movement. It is our constitutional right to raise our voice in Chandigarh," said Patiala.

Police also deployed anti-riot vehicles, ambulances and fire brigades as they upped the security personal.

On Tuesday, Punjab police detained several farmer leaders, including Balbir Singh Rajewal, Ruldu Singh Mansa, Gurmeet Singh Bhatiwal, Nachhttar Singh Jaiton, Veerpal Singh Dhillon, Binder Singh Golewal, Gurnam Bhikhi and Harmesh Singh.

The SKM, which led the 2020 agitation against the now-repealed three farm laws, is demanding the withdrawal of the Centre's draft of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, and demanding a law for debt settlement. —*PTI*

Farmers with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha claimed they were not allowed to head towards Chandigarh for a planned 'dharna' **PHOTO: PTI**

Maharashtra Tiger count up to 444 from 101 in 2000

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Maharashtra Forest Minister Ganesh Naik said the state's tiger count has gone up to 444 this year from 101 in 2000, and the government has approved funds of Rs 200 crore for solar fencing of villages near tiger habitats. Naik noted this in the state assembly while speaking on man-animal conflicts in a wildlife sanctuary near Bhandara. The minister said two people were killed in the area in tiger attacks this year. Congress Legislature Party leader Vijay Wadettiwar said there was anger among locals over tiger attacks. Farmers were living in fear as tigers and leopards destroy crops as well, he said. Members cutting across party lines expressed concern over the increasing incidents of human-wildlife conflict. —*PTI*

Two earthquakes, rock Manipur, one of 5.7 magnitude

SHILLONG/IMPHAL/ GUWAHATI, 5 MARCH

Two consecutive earthquakes, including one of 5.7 magnitudes, rocked Manipur and the tremors were felt across the Northeast, officials said. The earthquake of 5.7 magnitudes struck at 11.06am. Its epicentre was 44 km east of Yairipok in Imphal East district, and at a depth of 110 km, the Regional Seismological Centre said. The tremors were felt in Assam, Meghalaya and other parts of the region. A second earthquake of 4.1 magnitudes hit at 12.20pm. It struck the Kamjong district, at a depth of 66 km. Cracks were seen in several buildings. Videos online showed cracks at a school building. "We are verifying the reports of the damage," an official said. —*PTI*

OBC man tortured in Maharashtra, 1 arrested

JALNA, 5 MARCH

A man belonging to an OBC community has allegedly been tortured and branded with a hot rod by two brothers over a dispute in Maharashtra's Jalna district following which police have arrested one of the accused, officials said on Wednesday. Some clips of the incident, have gone viral on social media, sparking an outrage and prompting activists of OBCs to protest and demand immediate arrest of the absconding accused. The accused forcibly took the victim to the temple's kitchen, stripped him and branded him with a hot rod on his thighs, stomach and knees, the complaint alleged. The victim suffered severe injuries and was rushed to a hospital for treatment. One of the accused was arrested on Monday, while search was on for his brother, Paradh police station inspector Santosh Mane said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Actress Ayesha Takia alleges husband, son bullied in Goa

PANAJI, 5 MARCH

Hatred for Maharashtra has reached unbelievable heights in Goa, former actor Ayesha Takia said after her husband Abu Farhan Azmi was booked for an altercation at a supermarket in Candolim in north Goa. She said her husband and son were "brutally bullied". On Tuesday, police in Goa filed a case against Farhan Azmi, the son of Maharashtra SP MLA Abu Azmi charges of a scuffle in a public place and disturbing peace following their altercation in Candolim village on Monday night, following his comments praising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. On Wednesday, the MLA was suspended from the assembly till the end of the ongoing budget session.. The police in turn, have filed a complaint against Farhan when he was the one in fact who dialed 100 for help against the crowd of almost 150 people," she added. —*PTI*

INFO FROM PVT INVESTIGATOR

CBI seeks US' assistance in Bofors scam probe

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The CBI sent a judicial request to the United States seeking information from private investigator Michael Hershman, who had expressed willingness to share crucial details about the Rs 64-crore Bofors bribery scandal of the 1980s, officials said.

Hershman, head of the Fairfax Group, visited India in 2017 to attend a conference of private detectives. During his stay, he appeared on various platforms, alleging that the investigation into the scam was derailed by the then Congress government.

In an interview, he had claimed that he was appointed by the Union Finance Ministry in 1986 for investigating violations of currency control laws and money laundering by Indians abroad. Some of his investigations pertained to the Bofors deal.

The CBI had registered the case in 1990, three years after a Swedish radio channel alleged that bribes were paid by Bofors to politicians and defence officials of India.

The allegations caused a huge scandal for the Rajiv Gandhi government and had been used by rival parties to target the Congress.

The scam pertains to allegations of a Rs 64-crore bribe in a Rs 1,437-crore deal with Swedish firm Bofors for the supply of 400 155mm field Howitzers, which played a significant role in India's victory during the Kargil war.

The Delhi High Court had exonerated Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, nearly 13 years after he was assassinated.

In 2005, the Delhi High Court quashed all charges against the remaining accused. —*PTI*

Rescue operation underway at the partially collapsed Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel, in Nagarkurnool, Telangana **PHOTO: PTI**

12 days on in tunnel ops; no workers found

NAGARKURNOOL, 5 MARCH

The rescue operation at the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel, where eight people have been trapped for the past 12 days, continued at a brisk pace on Wednesday, with excavation being carried out at locations suggested by scientists.

The conveyor belt at the tunnel, which has been repaired and made operational, is assisting the rescue teams in shifting debris out, officials said.

However, tough conditions inside the tunnel, including muck and water, remain a challenge.

Officials on Tuesday said representatives of the National Centre for Seismology in Delhi also joined rescue efforts.

Eight people have been trapped in the tunnel since 22 February. — *PTI*

Drug addiction a quasi-pandemic: Bombay HC

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Drug trafficking is a serious crime and drug addiction is a "quasi pandemic", the Bombay High Court said. The court stressed the need for authorities to strictly follow the mandated rules while arresting a person and during recovery procedure.

People dealing in drugs in the society need to be dealt with an iron fist but it cannot be at the cost of liberty of an individual, a single bench of Justice Milind Jadhav said in an order passed on Tuesday.

The court made the remarks while granting bail to four persons arrested in 2023 for alleged possession of medicinal drugs under provisions of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The accused had raised procedural irregularities by authorities when they were arrested and while carrying out search of their residences.

The bench said the prosecuting agency has to strictly follow the procedure laid down in law during recovery procedure. "This is because the liberty of an accused is too precious of a right to be taken away on the basis of flimsy/ arbitrary procedure."

"Drug trafficking is a serious crime and the menace of drug traffickers is prevalent not just in India but across the globe. It will not be wrong to describe that drug addiction is a quasi pandemic," the judge said.

The purpose of courts is to secure the rights of citizens and should not mechanically reject bail pleas just to back "national importance and international prevalence", the justice said. "We as a system need to invest our resources on educating our statutory officers," the judge said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

> The Bombay High Court said that the liberty of an accused is too precious to be taken away on the basis of flimsy or arbitrary procedures

SC contempt notices to Punjab over pension dues

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Supreme Court issued a contempt notice to the Punjab chief secretary for failing to implement a three-decade-old pensionary benefits scheme in the state.

"In spite of repeated undertakings given to the high court, compliance has not been made by the state government. Therefore, we issue showcause notice to KAP Sinha, chief secretary, State of Punjab calling upon him to showcause why action under the Contempt Of Courts Act 1971 (both civil and criminal) should not be initiated against him," the court said.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by one Rajnish Kumar and others regarding the non-implementation of the Punjab Privately Managed Affiliated and Punjab Government Aided Colleges Pensionary Benefits Scheme, 1996.

The bench said if the official felt some other officer was at fault, he was "free to file an affidavit" giving the names or details of the officers —*PTI*

HC: People who missed train in Delhi stampede not petitioners

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Delhi High Court refused to allow persons, who missed their train due to the 15 February stampede, to be impleaded as parties in a PIL over the tragic event at the New Delhi Railway Station.

A bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked them to avail 'personal' remedies such as a lawsuit for the redressal of their grievances, including damages.

The counsel for the applicants said their request to the authorities, for a refund of their tickets after having "escaped" the stampede, was not entertained.

The court, however, asked the petitioners to seek compensation through personal course of action as the scope of the PIL was on the implementation of certain legal provisions on crowd and passenger management, and it had 'nothing to do with the incident'.

Petitioner Arth Vidhi said in its PIL that the overnight stampede at New Delhi Railway station caused by a surge of passengers to go to Prayagraj, claiming 18 lives and leaving 15 injured, revealed 'gross mismanagement' and failure of administration. —*PTI*

The stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station which claimed 18 lives caused many to miss their trains **PHOTO: PTI**

UP man kills self, claims he was harassed by wife

SAMBHAL, 4 MARCH

A 30-year-old man allegedly killed himself on Tuesday in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal. His family claimed he left a suicide note accusing his wife and in-laws of harassment, police said.

According to the complaint, Gaurav Kumar, consumed a poisonous substance on Sunday, following he died on Tuesday.

Gaurav allegedly married Priya a year ago but disputes arose between the two and she returned to her parents' home She allegedly demanded money from and threatened to file a dowry harassment case.

In the note, Gaurav allegedly held Priya and her family responsible for his death, stating he suffered injustice and was taking his life due to their harassment. —*PTI*

Malayalam film 'Marco' denied streaming rights

T'PURAM, 5 MARCH

Malayalam film 'Marco,' termed as the most violent movie ever made in the language, will not get satellite streaming rights as the regional office of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) rejected a plea by its producers for category conversion from 'A' certificate to 'UA' for obtaining TV rights.

The regional examination committee had turned down the application of 'Marco' producers for category conversion on 19 February, T Nadeem Thufali, regional officer of CBFI, told PTI.

Thufali said satellite rights are given to films with either 'U' or 'UA' certificates.

Parents should be vigilant to ensure that children do not watch movies with extreme violence, he said, adding the committee had made a formal recommendation to the Centre that the streaming of the movie be prohibited on the OTT platform also.

Censor Board member GM Mahesh said several private complaints by citizens thinking that CBFC can check the OTT streaming. "Hence we made a formal request," he told PTI. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Rs 4,000 cr Kedarnath ropeway approved

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The government on Wednesday approved two ropeway projects in Uttarakhand -- Sonprayag to Kedarnath and Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji -- at a total cost of Rs 6,811 crore to help significantly reduce the travel time to the pilgrimage sites and boost tourism.

The construction of these two ambitious projects is likely to be completed in 4-6 years. The two ropeways will be constructed under the National Ropeways Development Programme – Parvatmala Pariyojana.

The Sonprayag to Kedarnath ropeway is planned to be developed in public-private partnership and will be based on the most advanced Tri-cable Detachable Gondola (3S) technology having the capacity to carry 1,800 passengers per hour per direction (PPHPD), which could ferry 18,000 passengers per day.

The journey to the Kedarnath temple is a challenging 16-km uphill trek from Gaurikund and is currently done on foot ponies, palanquins and helicopter. The proposed ropeway is planned to provide convenience to pilgrims.

This ropeway will be based on Monocable Detachable Gondola from Govindghat to Ghangaria (10.55 km), integrated with the Tricable Detachable Gondola technology from Ghangaria to Hemkund Sahib Ji (1.85 km) with the capacity to carry 1,100 passengers per hour per direction and ferry 11,000 passengers per day. —*PTI*

GENETIC CONCERNS

Study finds high inbreeding rates in South Indian communities

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

A study, analysing the genes of South Indian populations suggests a high inbreeding rate of nearly 60 per cent.

The historic practice of inbreeding or endogamy in which one marries within a small community, increases chances of passing down disease-causing gene variants to children, thereby raising the risk of genetic disorders.

Lead author Kumarasamy Thangaraj, senior scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, said endogamy is the primary cause for population-specific diseases in India.

PHOTO: ANI

The study, published in the Journal of Genetics and Genomics, also reported a high prevalence of ankylosing spondylitis, a common form of inflammatory arthritis, in the Reddy population of Andhra Pradesh. The researchers attributed this to the presence of the 'HLA-B27:04' -- a genetic variant known to increase risk of the condition.

The endogamy practice is deeply rooted in the caste system.

The authors also identified variants responsible for diseases and drug responses unique to a specific population. Results related to drug responses have implications for personalised medicine.

The researchers had looked at blood samples of 281 individuals, belonging to four populations -- Yadav of Puducherry, Kalinga and Reddy of Andhra Pradesh, and Kallar of Tamil Nadu. —*PTI*

ASHA workers ask Kerala women to join protest

T'PURAM 5 MARCH

ASHA workers on Wednesday protesting outside the Secretariat said they will intensify their protest inviting all women of the state to join them on International Women's Day on 8 March. ASHA workers have been protesting for 24 days continuously demanding a hike in their honorarium and retirement benefits.

They also said that they were not concerned whether it was the Centre or the state government which is responsible for their predicament.

"They both are equally responsible and should work together to solve the issue. Our issue is that we cannot survive by working for Rs 232 per day," one of the protesting ASHA workers said. —*PTI*

JOY AND HAPPINESS

Performers during Carnival celebrations at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is considered the biggest carnival in the world, as it celebrates identity, culture, community and creativity
PHOTO: PTI

Trump's Congress address shows a partisan intent

A president of the United State's speech to Congress — even without the formal gloss of a State of the Union address — is typically a time for a call to national unity and claims about the country's strength.

But that wasn't President Donald Trump's plan. His speech on Tuesday night was relentlessly partisan, boasting about his election victory and criticising Democrats.

The hard edge reflected Trump's steamroller approach to his second term, brushing aside opposition and demanding loyalty.

Trump set a tone of division almost from his first words, calling his predecessor Joe Biden the worst president in history. He placed himself alongside the country's first president, George Washington, when discussing what he claimed were early achievements of his second term.

He was speaking to a house divided. Republicans stood and cheered. For Democrats, it was silence, with occasional shouts of protest, with the only applause when he announced that Ukraine wanted to restart peace negotiations.

Trump leaned hard into cultural flashpoints — his opposition to affirmative action, diversity programmes and transgender rights. He inflated the scale of his victory in November, the margin of which was actually among the smallest in American history.

The tenor was more that of a campaign speech than an address to Congress.

Trump described Democrats as a lost cause. "There is absolutely nothing I can say to make them happy," he said.

Trump has so far been unsparing in his criticism of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. But towards the end of his address, Trump read from a letter from Zelenskyy.

"The letter reads Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring," Trump said. "Nobody wants peace more than the Ukrainians."

US President Donald Trump's speech to the Congress was akin to a campaign rally. He constantly belittled his predecessor Joe Biden as his assertions prompted Rebublicans to cheer and Democrats to protest ***PHOTO: PTI***

It remains to be seen if the letter will mark a detente in the long-complicated Trump-Zelenskyy relationship.

The president also blamed Biden instead of the bird flu over the rising costs of groceries — particularly the eggs.

"Joe Biden especially let the price of eggs get out of control — and we are working hard to get it back down," Trump said.

His agriculture secretary, Brooke Rollins, said last week that egg prices could still soar more than 40 per cent this year.

The main reason egg prices increased to a record average of USD 4.95 per dozen this month is that more than 166 million birds have been slaughtered to limit the spread of bird flu in the country.

Trump also lavished praise on Elon Musk, tasked with overhauling the federal government and work force. Democrats tried to verbally fact check the president by shouting "false".

Musk, seated in the gallery above, stood when Republicans applauded him. Democrats held signs saying "Musk steals."

Trump said that Musk has found "hundreds of billions of dollars of fraud," vastly overstating his team's accomplishments. For example, many cancelled contracts were already fully paid, meaning the government received no savings.

The president has long viewed the stock market as a lodestar. But he ignored Wall Street losses that wiped out gains since the election.

The stock market has been tumbling as Trump enacts tariffs on Canada and Mexico, critical trading partners that have been retaliating with their own levies.

Trump showed no interest in backing off, describing tariffs as integral to his political agenda.

"Tariffs are about making America rich again and making America great again. And it's happening and it will happen rather quickly."

Trump has always revelled in his reputation for tough talk. But a look back at 2017, when Trump gave his first speech to Congress in his first term, shows how Trump has only become more of a hardliner. Eight years ago, he talked about working with Canada's Trudeau. He said "real and positive immigration reform is possible." There was no reference to Barack Obama, who he replaced.

Now Trump is feuding with Trudeau over tariffs. He used his speech to criticise diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, which he's been swiftly eliminating across the federal government. His remarks on immigration focused on deporting criminals.

And he repeatedly derided Biden. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Crisis ensues as Israel cuts off aid to Gaza

Israel's cutoff of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies to Gaza's 2 million people has sent prices soaring and humanitarian groups into overdrive trying to distribute dwindling stocks to the most vulnerable.

The aid freeze has imperiled the tenuous progress aid workers say they have made to stave off famine over the past six weeks during Phase 1 of the ceasefire deal Israel and Hamas agreed to in January.

After more than 16 months of war, Gaza's population is entirely dependent on trucked-in food and other aid. Most are displaced from their homes, and many need shelter. Fuel is needed to keep hospitals, water pumps, bakeries and telecommunications — as well as trucks delivering aid — operating.

Israel says the siege aims at pressuring Hamas to accept its spinoff ceasefire proposal. Israel has delayed moving to the second phase of the deal, during which the flow of aid was supposed to continue. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that he is prepared to raise the pressure and would not rule out cutting off all electricity to Gaza if Hamas doesn't budge. Rights groups have called the cutoff a "starvation policy."

There's no major stockpile of tents in Gaza for Palestinians to rely on during the aid freeze, said Shaina Low, communications adviser for the Norwegian Refugee Council. The aid that came in during the ceasefire's first phase was "nowhere near enough to address all of the needs," she said.

"If it was enough, we wouldn't have had infants dying from exposure because of lack of shelter materials and warm clothes and proper medical equipment to treat them," she said.

Six infants in the Gaza Strip died from hypothermia during Phase 1.

Aid groups are now trying to assess what stocks they do have in Gaza.

"We're trying to figure out, what do we have? What would be the best use of our supply?" said Jonathan Crikx, a spokesperson for UNICEF. "We never sat on supplies, so it's not like there's a huge amount left to distribute."

He predicted a "catastrophic result" if the freeze continues.

During the ceasefire's first phase, humanitarian agencies rushed in supplies and quickly ramped up their capabilities. Aid workers set up more food kitchens, health centers and water distribution points. With more fuel coming in, they were able to double the amount of water drawn from wells, according to the UN humanitarian coordination agency, or OCHA.

The United Nations and associated nongovernmental organisations brought in around 100,000 tents as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians tried to return to their homes, only to find them destroyed or too damaged to live in.

But the progress relied on the flow of aid continuing.

The International Organisation for Migration now has 22,500 tents sitting in its warehouses in Jordan, after supply trucks brought back their undelivered cargo once entry was barred, said Karl Baker, regional crisis coordinator.

The International Rescue Commission has 6.7 tonnes (14,771 pounds) of medicines and medical supplies waiting to enter Gaza, the delivery of which is now "highly uncertain," said Bob Kitchen, vice president of the Emergencies and Humanitarian Action Department.

"It's imperative that aid access is now immediately resumed. With humanitarian needs sky high, more aid access is required, not less," Kitchen said.

The UN's humanitarian office said Tuesday that prices of vegetables and flour shot up after the crossings closed.

Sayed Mohamed al-Dairi walked through a bustling market in Gaza City just after the cutoff was announced. Prices that had just started to come down during the ceasefire had jumped back up, as sellers hiked the prices of their dwindling wares.

"The traders are massacring us, the traders are not merciful to us," he said. "In the morning, the price of sugar was 5 shekels, ask him now, the price has become 10 shekels."

In the central Gaza city of Deir Al-Balah, one cigarette priced at 5 shekels ($1.37) before the cutoff now stands at 20 shekels ($5.49). One kilo of chicken (2.2 pounds) that was 21 shekels ($5.76) is now 50 shekels. ($13.72). Cooking gas has soared even more, from 90 shekels ($24.70) for 12 kilos (26.4 pounds) to 1,480 shekels ($406.24).

With the ceasefire expiring and aid again frozen, Palestinians fear the worst. *—PTI*

The aid from the first ceasefire is not enough to sustain Palestinian people ***PHOTO: ANI***

Indians trapped in Myanmar's cyber scam nightmare cry for help

Pradeep Vijay, 24, from the Indian state of Maharashtra, was trafficked to Myawaddy, Myanmar in August 2022 after responding to a job offer through a social media platform that he believed to be genuine.

His brother, Deepak, told DW that Pradeep had initially been promised a data entry role but was soon tasked with scamming US-based Indian expats and luring victims into cryptocurrency investments.

"He endured torture and psychological coercion and we managed to pay ransom after months of captivity," Deepak said, adding that even to this day, his brother refuses to speak about the suffering he endured and is not the same person.

Many Indian nationals like Vijay have been coerced and fallen victim to international crime syndicates connected to the rise of cybercrime hubs in Southeast Asia.

After responding to employment advertisements, they are offered healthy pay packets and recruited as digital sales and marketing executives.

However, once they start their new jobs, they are forced into criminality by those running the scam centers, as India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar told parliament in December.

"In India, we have requested for the blocking of sites which promote such jobs. We have recommended prosecution in certain cases for people who have been involved in this," the minister said.

In July last year, Jaishankar pressed Myanmar's Foreign Minister U Than Shwe for the return of unlawfully detained Indians and emphasized the need to combat cyber-scam gangs.

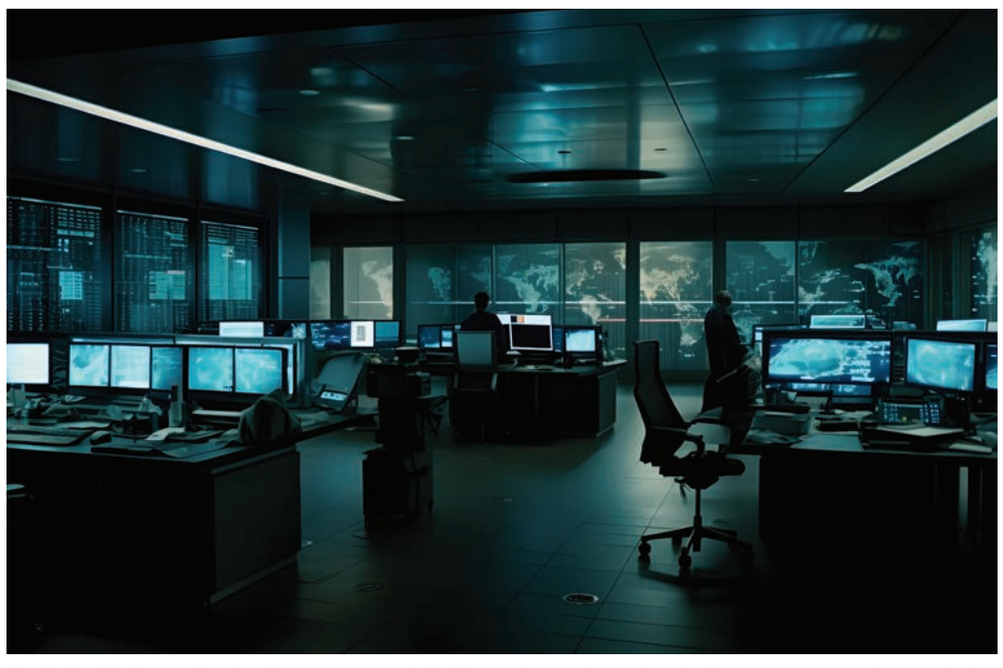
One of the prison-like scam compounds that have mushroomed across Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, called KK Park, is located in the town of Myawaddy, Myanmar, near the Thailand border.

At least a dozen Indians were recently rescued from KK Park by Myanmar's Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), an independent militia allied to the country's military junta, and relocated to Mae Sot, a border town in Thailand.

Indian investigative agencies report that many scam centers in Myawaddy operate from large complexes disguised as casinos or economic zones.

The operations are predominantly run by criminal syndicates, though they collaborate with local armed groups for protection and logistics.

"Many of the victims are given fake online identities and the scale of the operations is huge. They are trained to target gullible customers to invest in fraudulent schemes, such as fake cryptocurrency platforms," a senior intelligence official told DW, on the condition of anonymity.



The United Nations estimates that as many as 1,20,000 people may be working in Myanmar scam centers against their will ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

"We understand that Indians and other nationalities are held in prison-like conditions and are guarded around the clock. Refusal to participate in scams often leads to punishment, including torture," he added.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are working to combat these crimes through victim identification, prevention, and judicial coordination.

The UN estimates that as many as 120,000 people may be working in Myanmar scam centers against their will.

Official data shows that 29,466 Indians who traveled to Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam between January 2022 and May 2024 on visitor visas have not returned.

Shreekumar Menon, a narcotics and money laundering expert, told DW that many students slip out of the country in the guise of tourists and get kidnapped, incarcerated, and coerced to operate various cryptocurrency schemes and cyber hacking operations from remote locations.

"Our laws are not designed to nab foreigners working in different countries, whether in cybercrime or drug manufacture," said Menon, who has studied the issue closely.

"It is a very delicate situation, with educated Indians competing with uneducated Nigerians, in the international shadow markets and dark web, hunting for gullible people to dupe them of their savings, or to peddle new types of synthetic drugs," he added.

Scam operations in Myawaddy, particularly call-center "love scams" — often referred to as "pig butchering" — brings in massive profits.

In the scam, which is estimated to generate billions of dollars annually across Southeast Asia, a third party gains a victim's trust and, over time, convinces them to invest all of their money into cryptocurrency, which immediately disappears.

"Coercing people to commit cybercrimes in the real world has now become a new trend," Pawan Duggal, a cyber law expert, told DW.

Duggal noted that recent cases in Myanmar show that current legal frameworks are completely obsolete when it comes to preventing such cases. He highlighted the lack of an international cyberlaw treaty and weak global cooperation as key challenges.

Although Indian authorities have made multiple arrests related to illegal recruitment activities in several states, shadowy organizations continue to emerge.

Many agencies operate online or through unregistered subagents, making them hard to track. Hence, the number of arrests remains small compared to the estimated scope of trafficking and scam operations.

"While legislation and stronger enforcement are important, what is ultimately more crucial is that people's cyber awareness and cyber hygiene levels are constantly updated and improved," he added. "The government must play a crucial role in this." *—DW News*

Ukraine ready for peace with Russia: Trump

US President says Ukraine has agreed to sign deal on rare earth minerals and security

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 5 MARCH

US President Donald Trump said he has received "strong signals" from Russia that it is ready for peace and that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has written to him saying his country is ready to come to the negotiating table and also sign an agreement on minerals and security.

Trump made these remarks in an address to the Joint Session of Congress, the first of his second term in the White House.

"I'm also working tirelessly to end the savage conflict in Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainians and Russians have been needlessly killed or wounded in this horrific and brutal conflict with no end in sight," Trump said.

He told Congress that, he received an "important letter" from Zelenskyy.

President Donald Trump meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office at the White House on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

> **I'm also working tirelessly to end the savage conflict in Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainians and Russians have been needlessly killed or wounded in this horrific and brutal conflict with no end in sight**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

In another incident, Democratic Rep. Al Green of Texas blurt out a shout of protest during a presidential address to Congress.

Green said afterward it was worth it to make his point — even if he is punished by House leaders, who later called for the congressman to be censured.

"The president was saying he had a mandate, and I was making it clear that he has no mandate to cut Medicaid," Green told reporters, referring to the health care program used by 80 million Americans.

Meanwhile, Trump has set a record for the longest address to a joint session of Congress. And it wasn't even close.

He talked for more than an hour and 40 minutes, breaking the previous record set by President Bill Clinton's 2000 State of the Union address, which ran 1 hour, 28 minutes and 49 seconds.

TRUMP THANKS PAK

Trump also thanked Pakistan for helping the US in the arrest of terrorist Mohammad Shareefullah, also known as "Jafar", responsible for the Abbey Gate bombing in Afghanistan during the 2021 withdrawal of American forces.

The attacks came just days after the Taliban took over Kabul.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also thanked Trump for "acknowledging and appreciating" Pakistan's role in counter terrorism efforts after the country arrested a leading terrorist. *—PTI*

TRUMP SEEKS BAN ON CHILDREN'S SEX-CHANGE

WASHINGTON, 5 MARCH

US President Donald Trump has called on Congress to pass a bill "permanently banning and criminalising sex changes on children".

In his address to the joint session of Congress on Tuesday, Trump said, "I want Congress to pass a bill permanently banning and criminalizing sex changes on children... This is a big lie and our message to every child in America is that you are perfect exactly the way God made you. Because we are getting wokeness out of our schools and out of our military and it's already out and it's out of our society." *—ANI*

US NAMES HOUTHIS AS FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANISATION

The US redesignated Yemen's Houthi rebels as "foreign terrorist organisation", Al Jazeera reported. The move came after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order in January directing Secretary of State Marco Rubio to take "all appropriate action" against the Yemeni rebels, the Al Jazeera report said on Tuesday. *—ANI*

MORE THAN 440 FEDERAL BUILDINGS LISTED FOR POTENTIAL SALE

The Trump administration published a list of more than 400 federal properties it says it could close or sell, including the FBI headquarters and the main Department of Justice building, after deeming them "not core to government operations." In Washington, it includes the J Edgar Hoover Building, which serves as FBI headquarters. *—PTI*

WASHINGTON TO REMOVE 'BLACK LIVES MATTER' PAINTING FROM STREET

The US capital city will remove the large painting of the words "Black Lives Matter" on a street near the White House. Mayor Muriel Bowser posted on X, "The mural inspired millions of people and helped our city through a painful period, but now we can't afford to be distracted by meaningless congressional interference. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Powerful storms wreak havoc in parts of US

NEW ORLEANS, 5 MARCH

Powerful storms tore the roofs off an apartment building and a nursing home in a small town in Oklahoma, damaged a high school near Dallas and threatened more communities across the nation Tuesday with wide-ranging weather. The large storm system also brought blinding dust storms to the Southwest, blizzards with whiteout conditions to the Midwest and raised fears of wildfires in other parts of the country. In Irving, Texas, a tornado with winds up to 177 kph struck, while another touched down in the 16,000-resident city of Ada, Oklahoma, according to preliminary information from the National Weather Service. In New Orleans, the city shortened the Mardi Gras celebration's two biggest parades to wrap them up before high winds moved in. *—PTI*

Ousted Los Angeles fire chief seeks to regain position

LOS ANGELES, 5 MARCH

The former Los Angeles fire chief ousted by Mayor Karen Bass after the most destructive wildfire in the city's history sought on Tuesday to reclaim her job, with unionised firefighters arguing that the chief was axed without justification after publicly criticising City Hall for shortchanging the department. The City Council was scheduled to vote on the appeal filed by former Chief Kristen Crowley, who was dismissed by Bass last month amid finger-pointing between Crowley and City Hall over responsibility for the devastation and funding for the department. Crowley needed the support of 10 of the council's 15 members to reverse Bass' order and regain her job, which appeared to be a longshot. The firefighters said she had been scapegoated and fired for speaking honestly. *—PTI*

Philippine fighter jet's wreckage found; pilots dead

MANILA, 5 MARCH

Philippine military officials said on Tuesday that rescuers have found the wreckage of a missing fighter jet and the bodies of its two pilots in a mountainous region of a southern province where they were deployed to fight communist rebels. The FA-50 jet lost communication during the combat mission with other air force aircraft after midnight Tuesday before reaching a target area in southern Bukidnon province. The other aircraft were able to return safely to an air base in central Cebu province after carrying out assaults, military officials said. *—PTI*

Indian jailed in Singapore for molesting woman

SINGAPORE, 5 MARCH

An Indian national was sentenced to seven months' jail on Wednesday after pleading guilty to one count of molestation, with one count of housebreaking taken into consideration for his sentencing. Erakkodan Abinraj, 26, climbed into his neighbour's condominium unit and molested a 36-year-old woman. She was asleep in the master bedroom with her husband, and her daughter was in another room, when Abinraj, who entered the house through the balcony around 4.50am on 22 September last year, molested her. The victim woke up as she felt someone touching her, a Channel News Asia report said. The victim screamed, waking her husband who confronted Abinraj. The victim called the police and Abinraj stayed in the unit until the police arrived, the report said. *—PTI*

Israel okays $1B for Druzes, Circassians

TEL AVIV, 5 MARCH

PHOTO: X

The Israeli government is preparing to adopt an unprecedented five-year USD 1.08B development plan for the Druze and Circassian communities to boost local economies, housing and local planning, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Monday.

"This is an unprecedented plan that will catapult Druze society forward," Netanyahu said of the largest economic initiative proposed for those communities.

"We greatly appreciate this resolution," said Yasser Jedban, Chairman of the Forum of Druze and Circassian Authorities. "This is national pride, and we are grateful for the government's ongoing support."

The five-year plan outlines several strategic areas for investment. USD 180M will be allocated to improve planning and housing, with a dedicated planning committee being established to accelerate development and streamline processes. This includes efforts to promote new construction, particularly for discharged soldiers and young couples, as well as improving infrastructure such as electricity connections.

Another significant component of the plan is the empowerment of local authorities. More than USD 27.7M will be directed toward strengthening budgets, improving organisational efficiency, and enhancing service delivery. Localities will also benefit from investments in economic projects designed to promote financial independence and stimulate growth.

The plan outlines a USD 124M to enhance the education system, better aligning it with the demands of the future job market.

Additionally, more than 1 billion NIS will be allocated to boost local economies, integrate the community into high-tech industries, increase productivity, and develop industrial zones. *—ANI*

China hikes defence budget to $249B

BEIJING, 5 MARCH

PHOTO: FREEPIK

China on Wednesday announced a 7.2 per cent increase of its national defence budget totalling to USD 249B this year amid its hectic efforts to modernise armed forces, including fast paced development of warships and new generation fighter jets.

The planned defence expenditure for the country is about USD 249B this year, according to a draft budget report submitted to China's Parliament by Premier Li Qiang, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232B.

China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890B as proposed by President Donald Trump.

The Chinese defence spending is amounted to three times that of India's Rs 681, 210 crore (USD 78.8B).

China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in the light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Announcing the annual budget which includes the defence spending at the opening of the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress Chinese Premier Li Qiang said last year, China made major new progress in national defence and military development. *—PTI*

Myanmar's Gen Hlaing meets Putin

MOSCOW, 5 MARCH

Vladimir Putin with Gen. Min Aung Hlaing **PHOTO: PTI**

Russian President Vladimir Putin met head of Myanmar's military government, who seeks to cement cooperation with Moscow as he faces isolation and sanctions from the West.

Gen. Min Aung Hlaing was on his fourth trip to Russia since his army seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Western nations have imposed economic and political sanctions in response to the takeover and the violent repression of opposition, which has led to the deaths of thousands of civilians and given rise to an armed conflict widely seen as civil war.

At the start of the Kremlin talks, Putin noted growing bilateral trade and close cooperation in the international arena, and thanked the Myanmar leader for sending six baby elephants to Moscow.

Russia, along with China, is a major supporter and arms supplier to Myanmar. Russian-made fighter jets are used in attacks on territory under control of ethnic minority groups, many of them allies with pro-democracy resistance forces.

Russia and Myanmar signed agreements to outline cooperation around Moscow building nuclear power plants in Myanmar and recognize academic qualifications. Ming Aung Hlaing also emphasised his military government's support for Russia's military action in Ukraine. *—PTI*

Tate brothers face criminal probe in Florida

FLORIDA, 5 MARCH

US authorities have announced the launch of a criminal investigation into controversial social media influencers Andrew and Tristan Tate.

Florida attorney general James Uthmeier said that he had instructed his office "to work with our law enforcement partners to conduct a preliminary inquiry" into the brothers.

The Tate brothers – who arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on 27 February, after Romanian authorities lifted a travel ban against them – are facing trial in Romania for allegedly operating a criminal ring that lured women to the country for sexual exploitation.

The Tates – who are dual US-British citizens – command millions of mostly young, male followers on social media, who are drawn to their luxurious lifestyle, hyper-masculine image and misogynist rhetoric. *—Agencies*

B'desh got no response from India on Hasina's extradition: Yunus

Sheikh Hasina and Muhammad Yunus **PHOTOS: X**

DHAKA, 5 MARCH

Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has said that Dhaka had sent "formal letters" to India seeking deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's extradition but received "no official response" from New Delhi.

In an interview with UK-based Sky News, Yunus said Hasina will stand trial for "crimes against humanity", the state-run BSS news agency reported.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since 5 August last year, when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

"A trial will be taking place. Not only against her, but also all the people associated with her - her family members, her clients or associates," Yunus said.

Bangladesh has issued two arrest warrants for her.

Yunus said they had sent "formal letters" but received "no official response" from New Delhi.

Last year, India confirmed receiving the 'note verbale' or diplomatic communication from the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi but refrained from commenting on it. *—PTI*

N Korea's early warning aircraft nears completion

SEOUL, 5 MARCH

Russian A-50U with radome **PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA**

North Korea appears close to completing its first airborne early warning aircraft, satellite imagery showed, an asset that experts say will sharply bolster the country's air force power when deployed.

North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes pose a significant security threat to South Korea, the US and others. But its aerial surveillance capability is far behind those of its rivals, while most of its fighter jets and other military aircraft are aging.

38 North, a website specialising in North Korea studies, reported Tuesday that recent commercial satellite imagery showed an Ilyushin IL-76 aircraft parked at a Pyongyang airport, with a large radome mounted on top of the fuselage. A radome refers to a structure that encircles a radar system.

It called the aircraft's near-completion "a significant upgrade for an air force that has not seen new airborne capabilities in years".

The website said the radome has a distinctive triangle design on top, similar to what is seen on some Chinese airborne early warning aircraft.

"This could indicate support or influence from China, although the triangle alone is not conclusive proof," the website said. *—PTI*

INTENSE FLOODING FEARED

Brisbane braces for first cyclone in 51 yrs

MELBOURNE, 5 MARCH

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Residents were stacking sandbags to protect low-lying properties on Wednesday ahead of a tropical cyclone forecast to become the first in 51 years to hit the Australian east coast near Brisbane, the nation's third-most populous city.

Tropical Cyclone Alfred is forecast to cross the coast between the Queensland state capital Brisbane and the tourist city of Gold Coast to the south late Thursday or early Friday, Bureau of Meteorology manager Matt Collopy said. Brisbane and Gold Coast are a continuous urban sprawl. Their centres are 80km apart.

Alfred was over the Pacific Ocean 400km east of Brisbane and tracking west on Wednesday with sustained winds near the centre of 95 kph with gusts to 130 kph.

"That is destructive winds," Collopy said. "Large swells and powerful waves have been observed along the Queensland coast for several days now with severe coastal erosion and inundation happening," Collopy told reporters in Brisbane. "This will continue and likely get worse as the system approaches and makes landfall."

Heavy rain and flooding were expected in the days ahead, he said. "The wave, wind, rainfall and particularly the storm surge present significant risks," Collopy added.

Cyclones are common in Queensland's tropical north but are rare in the state's temperate and densely populated southeast corner that borders New South Wales state.

Cyclone Zoe crossed the coast at the southern end of Gold Coast on the New South Wales border in March 1974, causing extensive flooding.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government was providing Queensland with 250,000 sandbags in addition to 80,000 the military had already delivered. *—PTI*

Rupee settles 19p higher at 87 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

The rupee appreciated by 19 paise to close at 87.00 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday on sharp pullback in domestic equities, a weak American currency and a decline in crude oil prices. Forex traders told US President Donald Trump's tariff escalation has set off a chain reaction in global markets, sending the dollar into a downward spiral. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee witnessed high volatility. It opened at 87.18 then touched the intraday high of 86.93 and the low of 87.20 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 87.00 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 19 paise from its previous closing level. *—PTI*

Gold rises to ₹89,300/10g, silver rallies ₹1,000

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Gold prices rose by Rs 300 to trade near a record high at Rs 89,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a strong global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 89,000 per 10 grams in the previous market session. On 20 February, gold hit a record high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams. "Gold prices continued their upward trend on Wednesday, extending their winning streak for the third day in a row as the demand for safe-haven assets and soft US dollar supported yellow metals," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Further, the implementation of US tariffs and counter-retaliation by Canada and China increased the chance of escalation of the trade war and a global economic slowdown -- a situation favouring gold demand for safety, Gandhi said. Silver prices also rallied by Rs 1,000 to Rs 99,000 per kg .*—PTI*

OYO estimates ₹1,100 cr PAT for FY26

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Travel tech unicorn OYO estimates its profit after tax to touch Rs 1,100 crore in the next financial year 2025-26, according to projections shared by Founder Ritesh Agarwal with the company's leadership on Wednesday, sources said. The company expects EBITDA of Rs 2,000 crore for the same period, on the back of a strong top-line growth, buoyed by the recent Motel 6 acquisition. Motel 6 is projected to contribute an EBITDA of over Rs 630 crore in the coming financial year, which will be the first full year of its integration, according to sources. For the first nine months of FY25, OYO reported a PAT of Rs 457 crore, compared to a loss of Rs 111 crore in the same period of the previous financial year. *—PTI*

Aurobindo arm calls off pact with S'pore firm for vaccine

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Aurobindo Pharma on Wednesday said its subsidiary has terminated a license agreement with Singapore-based Hilleman Laboratories to develop and commercialise a pentavalent vaccine candidate used in children vaccination. Auro Vaccines, a wholly-owned step-down subsidiary of the company, has terminated the pact with Hilleman Laboratories on Wednesday, Aurobindo Pharma said in a regulatory filing. Auro Vaccines is not a material subsidiary to the company and the termination of a licence agreement for a very early-stage vaccine asset is not a material event, it added. It may also be noted that the termination of the agreement will not have any significant impact on the company and/or its subsidiaries or its financials, the Hyderabad-based drug firm said. Auro Vaccines and Hilleman Laboratories had inked the agreement on 27 September, 2023. *—PTI*

Sensex jumps 740 pts, Nifty breaks 10-day losing streak

Nifty settles at 22,337.30, a day after its lowest record in 29 yrs

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Benchmark BSE Sensex surged by 740 points while Nifty snapped its 10-day losing streak on Wednesday following value buying in utilities and power shares and a strong trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged by 740.30 points or 1.01 per cent to close at 73,730.23. The index jumped 943.87 points or 1.29 per cent to hit an intra-day high of 73,933.80.

Cutting short its record 10-day falling streak, the broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 254.65 points or 1.15 per cent to settle at 22,337.30, breaking its 10-day losing streak—the longest since 1996. During the day, it appreciated by 312.25 points or 1.41 per cent to a high of 22,394.90.

Broader markets also closed higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 2.80 per cent and midcap index advancing 2.66 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms appreciated by Rs 7,97,247.7 crore to Rs 3,93,04,041.75 crore (USD 4.51 trillion).

Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank are the laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

From the Sensex pack, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle India, HCL Technologies, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Asian Paints and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the gainers.

Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, and Zomato were the laggards.

"Strong global market cues led the recovery in domestic indices as talks that the Trump administration could reverse some tariffs amidst the ongoing global trade tensions buoyed sentiment," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Also, local factors such as an increase in the February PMI index also boosted the sentiment in the markets, Tapse said. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul closed higher. European markets were trading in the positive zone. Wall Street ended lower on Tuesday.

- Global oil benchmark Brent crude decreased 0.49 per cent to USD 70.69 a barrel.On the other hand, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,405.82 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data

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Services sector growth sees sharp uptick in Feb: PMI

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

India's services sector activity witnessed a sharp uptick in February boosted by improving domestic and international demand, which resulted in a quicker expansion in output and a substantial increase in employment, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from January's 26-month low of 56.5 to 59.0 in February, indicating a sharp rate of expansion.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to the survey, productivity gains, favourable underlying demand and greater intake of new business.

Moreover, gains in international orders supported this uptick in growth, with service providers reporting better demand from clients in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Middle East, the survey said.

Advertising, better customer relations, efficiency gains

PHOTO: X

and healthy demand conditions all underpinned upbeat projections for output in the year ahead. Around one-quarter of survey members forecast growth in the year ahead, while fewer than 2 per cent were pessimistic.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite Output Index rose from 57.7 to 58.8, indicating a substantial rate of expansion.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, the Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year.

The growth in the current fiscal and less than 7 per cent expected in the next will keep India as the fastest-expanding major economy. *—PTI*

MUSK VS ALTMAN

Judge denies Musk's request to block OpenAI for-profit conversion

OAKLAND, 5 MARCH

A federal judge has denied US billionaire Elon Musk's request for a court order blocking OpenAI from converting itself to a for-profit company but said she could expedite a trial to consider Musk's claims against the ChatGPT maker and its CEO.

US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers ruled out that "Musk has not demonstrated likelihood of success on the merits" in his request for a preliminary injunction. She offered to hold a trial in her California courtroom as soon as this fall, "given the public interest at stake and potential for harm if a conversion contrary to law occurred."

Musk, an early OpenAI investor, began a legal offensive against the ChatGPT maker and CEO Sam Altman a year ago, suing for breach of contract over what he said was the betrayal of its founding aims as a nonprofit. He escalated the legal dispute late last year, adding new claims and defendants, including Microsoft, and asking for a court order that would stop OpenAI's plans to convert itself into a for-profit business. Musk also added his own AI company, xAI, as a plaintiff, claiming that OpenAI was unfairly stifling business competition. OpenAI said it welcomed the court's decision.

Musk alleges in the lawsuit that the companies are violating the terms of his foundational contributions to the charity. He had invested about USD 45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018, his lawyer has said. *—PTI*

GOVT IMPOSES IMPORT CURBS ON PLATINUM ALLOY

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The government on Wednesday imposed import curbs on platinum alloy with less than 99 per cent purity to curb illicit imports of this precious metal blended with significant amounts of gold.

Importers of such platinum alloys are now required to obtain import authorisation from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) for the inbound shipments.

The decision follows cases where this alloy blended with significant amounts of gold was imported to exploit the tariff differential between gold and platinum.

"Import policy of platinum...is revised from free to restricted except for platinum alloy of 99 per cent or more purity by weight of platinum," the DGFT said in a notification.

To ensure a smooth supply of platinum for jewellery manufacturing and industrial use, the government allows the unrestricted import of platinum alloy with 99 per cent or higher purity of platinum.

PHOTO: X

GTRI last year sought urgent review of India-UAE trade, the pact stating that the agreement allows unlimited imports of gold, silver, platinum, and diamonds from the UAE into India with zero tariffs.

It highlighted that currently, gold can be imported from Dubai at 5 per cent duty, but this will drop to zero in three years if the alloy contains 2 per cent platinum. GTRI also claimed that many imports do not meet Rules of Origin conditions and, hence, do not qualify for concessions. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Pepsi pokes Coca-Cola with 'anytime' over 'half-time' ad

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The never-ending hilarious ad war between beverage majors Coca-Cola and PepsiCo has taken off this season with Pepsico's 'any time' jibe at its bigger rival Coca-Cola's 'half-time' campaign.

Replying to arch rival Coca-Cola's 'half time' campaign for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, PepsiCo came out with a full-page newspaper advertisement flipping the script with "any time" campaign with a direct hit on the cola major trying to grab the consumers' eyeball.

Pepsi in its latest ad has listed life's best moments -- first time, thirst time, day time, play time, class time, pass time, crunch time, lunch time, chill time, one more time, dinner time, winner time, down time, town time, we time, me time -- to enjoy the drink. *—PTI*

Zydus launches breakthrough drug for transplant patients

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Zydus Lifesciences on Wednesday said it has launched ANVIMO, a breakthrough medication for the prevention of Cytomegalovirus infection for haematopoietic stem cell transplant and kidney transplant patients.

ANVIMO (Letermovir) will be available in dosages of 240 mg and 480 mg, the drug firm said in a statement.

CMV infection remains one of the most serious complications in transplant patients, often leading to graft failure, decreased survival and prolonged hospital stays.

Traditional CMV treatments, such as ganciclovir and valganciclovir, have notable limitations, including toxicity and bone marrow suppression. Letermovir provides a safer, well-tolerated, and effective alternative, offering superior safety and reduced side effects while improving transplant outcomes.

"The introduction of ANVIMO marks a new era in bone marrow transplant and kidney transplant care in India. By making this critical therapy affordable and accessible, we are reinforcing our commitment to delivering world-class healthcare solutions," Zydus Lifesciences MD Sharvil Patel stated.

PHOTO: X

- Transplantation is a life-saving but financially burdensome procedure in India. The high cost of post-transplant care, particularly CMV prophylaxis, adds to the burden

Transplantation is a life-saving but financially burdensome procedure in India. The high cost of post-transplant care, particularly CMV prophylaxis, adds to the burden. Until now, innovator Letermovir 240 mg was imported at over Rs 5 lakh per month, severely limiting access.

With the launch of ANVIMO, Zydus said it has significantly reduced the cost by 91 per cent of the innovator price, making treatment of CMV prophylaxis significantly more affordable for Indian patients *—PTI*

HPCL, Tata Motors launch diesel exhaust fluid

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Public sector oil marketing firm HPCL on Wednesday launched a co-branded diesel exhaust fluid 'Genuine DEF' in collaboration with Tata Motors.

The co-branded diesel exhaust fluid will be available across 23,000 fuel stations of the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) pan-India as well as over 2,000 authorised outlets of Tata Motors. The high quality Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF) solution will drive optimal vehicle performance, boost drivetrain efficiency, and extend the vehicle's longevity.

DEF helps in reducing harmful emissions by breaking down potentially harmful nitrogen into safer and cleaner nitrogen and water. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

191 BILLIONAIRES

India sees 6% rise in millionaires: Report

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Number of Indian high-networth individuals (HNWIs), those having assets more than USD 10 million, rose 6 per cent last year to 85,698, according to Knight Frank.

Global property consultant Knight Frank on Wednesday released its 'The Wealth Report 2025', which estimated the HNWI population in India at 85,698 in 2024, as against 80,686 in the preceding year.

The number is expected to rise to 93,753 by 2028, reflecting India's expanding wealth landscape, the consultant said.

The increasing trend of HNIW population highlights the country's strong long-term economic growth, increasing investment opportunities, and evolving luxury market, positioning India as a key player in global wealth creation.

India is now home to 191 billionaires, of which 26 joined the ranks in just the last year *PHOTO: X*

India's billionaire population has also seen a strong year-on-year growth in 2024.

"India is now home to 191 billionaires, of which 26 joined the ranks in just the last year, which was pegged at just 7 in 2019," the consultant said.

The combined wealth of Indian billionaires is estimated at USD 950 billion, ranking the country third globally, behind the US (USD 5.7 trillion) and Mainland China (USD 1.34 trillion). "India's growing wealth underscores its economic resilience and long-term growth potential. The country is witnessing an unprecedented rise in high-net-worth individuals, driven by entrepreneurial dynamism, global integration, and emerging industries," Shishir Baijal, Chairman & Managing Director, Knight Frank India, said.

"In the decade ahead, India's influence in global wealth creation will only strengthen," Baijal said. *—PTI*

Govt to enforce 70% women in workforce by 2047

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The government will walk the talk on Viksit Bharat by 2047 with 70 per cent women in the workforce, Union Labour Secretary Sumita Dawra said on Wednesday as she highlighted the importance of mentorship for women entrepreneurs.

Addressing a CII conference on women in the services sector, she also said looking ahead there are sectors which hold great potential for women to participate further. She suggested enhancing education for them under National Education Policy.

For women entrepreneurs and startups, she called for increasing venture capital support.

"For women entrepreneurs, it (venture capital support) is very critical. Mentorship for women to be in leadership and decision-making roles. While we have provision, we also must have mentorship for women where it is needed," she said. About challenges faced by women in the services sector, she said there could be biases which prevent their entry in the workforce. There could be wage disparities, even in the leadership roles, job concerns and issues like balancing domestic, professional responsibility. *—ANI*

PHOTO:

LeBron becomes 1st to score 50K points in NBA

LOS ANGELES, 5 MARCH

LeBron James is well on his way to rewriting every previous definition of basketball longevity, and the 40-year-old star is now racking up numbers the NBA has never seen before. James became the first player to score 50,000 combined points in the regular season and postseason on Tuesday night, surpassing the mark with a 3-pointer early in the first quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' 136-115 win over New Orleans. James finished with 34 points against the Pelicans after toppling another milestone in his unprecedented career. With their victory over the Pelicans, the Lakers improved to 11-2 since acquiring Doncic —*PTI*

Khelo India Para Games to be held from 20 March

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Around 1230 para athletes, including international players, will compete at the second edition of the Khelo India Para Games (KIPG) scheduled to be held here from 20 to 27 March. The para athletes, many of them medallists at 2024 Paris Paralympics and 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China, will compete in six disciplines -- para archery, para athletics, para badminton, para powerlifting, para shooting and para table tennis. The Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium will host the para athletics, para archery and para powerlifting disciplines while the IG Stadium complex will stage the para badminton and para table tennis events —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

West Zone players wins SOG Grandmasters

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Akshita Jain, Jval Saurin Patel, Darpan Inani and Tanaji Gargote have emerged West Zone winners in their respective categories at the inaugural Skillhub Online Games Grandmasters Series here. Akshita won the Indian Chess Masters women category, while Swera Bragance and Dnyanada Unmesh Gujarathi clinched silver and bronze medals respectively. Mohammed Nubairshah Shaik and Wagh Suyog came second and third behind Patel in the ICM men's section. Inani topped the ICM for the Blind, while Aryan B Joshi and Kakade Atul earned silver and bronze respectively. Gargote won the gold in Indian Rummy Grandmasters, while Manish Shahre and Mangesh Machhi took the second and third positions. —*PTI*

UP Warriorz face must-win clash against MI

LUCKNOW, 5 MARCH

Time is running out for UP Warriorz, who face a must-win situation against Mumbai Indians in their Women's Premier League match here on Thursday. With their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, the Warriorz must bounce back from back-to-back defeats to stay in contention. It was a disappointing homecoming for the Warriorz, who were comprehensively beaten by Gujarat Giants at the Ekana Stadium in their previous fixture. The first-ever WPL match in Lucknow saw Beth Mooney producing a batting masterclass, guiding Gujarat Giants to 186/5, the third-highest total this season. Unlike their struggling opponents, Mumbai Indians find themselves in a relatively better position. —*PTI*

NZ beat SA by 50 runs, to face India in summit clash

New Zealand posted 362/6 as SA fell short at 312/9

LAHORE, 5 MARCH

New Zealand beat South Africa by 50 runs in Champions Trophy semifinal to set up a summit clash against India, here on Wednesday.

New Zealand scored a mammoth 362 for six after electing to bat, courtesy Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson's fluent centuries, and then restricted South Africa to 312 for 9 in 50 overs.

South Africa seemed to be on course in the initial part of their run chase but they stumbled later on, losing wickets in the middle overs, to eventually lose their way.

David Miller remained not out on 100 while captain Temba Bavuma (56) and Rassie van der Dussen (69) struck half centuries but those were not enough while chasing a tall target.

Mitchell Santner (3/43) was the most successful bowler for New Zealand with three wickets, while Glenn Phillips and Matt Henry also chipped in with two each.

Earlier, Ravindra produced a 101-ball 108-run knock that was laced with 13 fours and a six, while Williamson smashed 102 off 94 balls with 10 fours and two maximums. Daryl Mitchell (49) and Glenn Phillips (49 not out) provided the fireworks in the slog overs.

Top Score:
New Zealand: 362 for 6 in 50 overs (Rachin Ravindra 108, Kane Williamson 102; Lungi Ngidi 3/72).
South Africa: 312 for 9 in 50 overs (Temba Bavuma 56, Rassie van der Dussen 69, David Miller 100 not out; Mitchell Santner 3/43, Glenn Phillips 2/27, Matt Henry 2/43). —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Haven't played a perfect game so far, hopefully on 9 March

-Gautam Gambhir, India Head coach

Trying to get my rhythm; more responsibility on me

-Mohammed Shami, Front-line pacer

Kohli ready to conquer new peaks

DUBAI, 5 MARCH

Seldom does a Virat Kohli knock in a winning chase leaves one wanting for more. But his 84 that guided India to a semifinal victory over Australia in the Champions Trophy here had that touch of incompleteness to it.

A familiar Kohli hundred on Tuesday would have been his 25th three-figure mark while hunting down a target. But the master would not be too displeased about the knock he eventually managed as he ticked many boxes. Here are the two most important of them.

Box No.1: He tamed spinners, an Achilles Heel that haunted him for long, and more recently exploited by England's Adil Rashid and Bangladesh's Rishad Hossain.

Box No.2: The fifty was full of determination to defeat an opponent who had given India and him several heartbreaks in the past. Through it, he, perhaps, was conveying his readiness to battle on for some more time, conquer some more peaks.

Subsequently, he negated Pakistan's Abrar Ahmed, but Adam Zampa is in a different league as a white ball leg-spinner.

The slow Dubai pitch that slows down even more during the second half would have given more zing to Zampa's craft.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir appreciated the way Kohli planned his chase.

"That is the reason why he has got that kind of record in one-day cricket and I hope he continues to do that."

'REST FOR MY RACKET & BANDANA'

TT stalwart Sharath announces retirement

CHENNAI, 5 MARCH

Indian table tennis legend A Sharath Kamal will hang up his racket and the iconic bandana later this month, having stayed at the top of his game for more than 22 years and resisting the temptation of lasting another Olympic cycle at the ripe old age of 42.

In his own words, life has come full circle for one of India's finest athletes who will say goodbye to professional table tennis in front of his friends and family in Chennai, where the WTT (World Table Tennis) Star Contender and his swansong will be staged from 25 to 30 March.

Sharath's contribution to the game goes beyond the staggering numbers, including seven gold medals at the Commonwealth Games, two path-breaking bronze medals at the Asian Games and five appearances at the Summer Olympics.

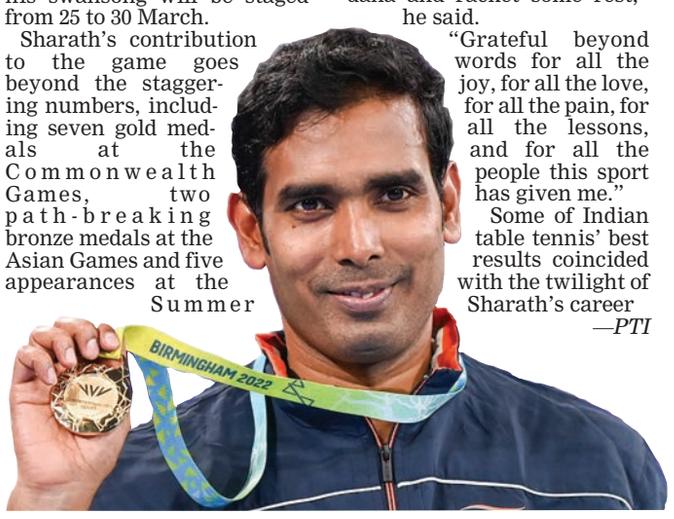
Paris last year was easily the highlight for him as an Olympian, having received the honour of carrying India's flag at the opening ceremony.

The results did not go his way in the French capital but considering his fitness and ranking (he remains India's highest ranked player at no. 42), Sharath decided to carry on for another season and take it from there.

"Not saying I am letting it go completely, but this is certainly the end for us on the big tables, in front of the big crowds. Time to give my bandana and racket some rest," he said.

"Grateful beyond words for all the joy, for all the love, for all the pain, for all the lessons, and for all the people this sport has given me."

Some of Indian table tennis' best results coincided with the twilight of Sharath's career —*PTI*



PRAGUE MASTERS

Praggu draws with Shankland

PRAGUE, 5 MARCH

Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram continued to remain in joint lead after drawing their sixth-round games in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here.

Praggnanandhaa was held to a draw by Sam Shankland of the United States, while Aravindh split the point with Quang Leim Le of Vietnam to be on four points out of a possible six, on a day when all the games were drawn for the first time in the tournament.

Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh continued to be followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Vincent Keymer of Germany and Quang Leim, all of whom are on three points apiece.

Another half-point behind are the Czech duo of Nguyen Thai Dai Van and David Navara, Gurel Ediz of Turkey and Shankland.

Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa with Sam Shankland PHOTO: X

With three more rounds to come, Praggnanandhaa holds the edge over Aravindh as he is set to play the next two games with white pieces. Aravindh, on the other hand, has only one game with white left.

The seventh round will be crucial for Praggnanandhaa as he takes on Wei Yi, while Aravindh will meet Anish, who has drawn all his games so far.

Praggnanandhaa was under pressure for some time in the middle game against his American opponent, who played white. The opening featured a regular Italian game and Shankland threw open the position. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

VANI TAKES 1-SHOT LEAD ON A TOUGH SCORING DAY

GURUGRAM, 5 MARCH

Vani Kapoor dropped two late bogeys but maintained focus to get a birdie on the final hole to take sole lead on the first day of the fifth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour here Wednesday.

Vani, winner of the fourth leg last month, shot 2-under 70 and took a one-shot lead over her good friend Amandeep Drall (71) at the Classic Golf & Country Club.

Vani and Amandeep were the only players to shoot under par on an extremely windy day when scoring was tough.

On a rather tough day for scoring, five players were tied for fourth with rounds of 4-over 76 and the group included amateur Ceerat Kang, Anahita Singh, Oviya Reddi, Neha Tripathi and Ridhima Dilawari.

Amandeep Drall opened with a bogey but got the shot back on the fifth. She dropped another shot on the Par-4 13th but closed with a birdie on the 14th and the 18th for a round of 71. Amandeep Drall, who went out in the first group with Gaurika Bishnoi in the morning, was the leader till Vani overtook her. —*PTI*

Advani beats Jain in CCI league

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Reigning champion Pankaj Advani on Wednesday recorded a 4-1 win over Telangana's Himanshu Jain in a round of 32 contest of the CCI Snooker Classic here.

Advani, who is representing PSPB, lost the first frame but bounced back with breaks of 61 in the third frame and 71 in the fifth frame to underline his title hopes, recording a 4-1 (43-77, 72-56, 80(61)-33, 64-51, 80(71)-6) victory. Advani has won the tournament's last two editions.

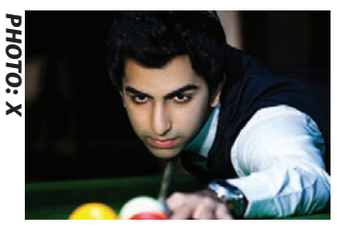


PHOTO: X

In another game, India No 3 and PSPB's Aditya Mehta beat Karnataka's Yogesh Kumar 4-3 (42-77, 53-86(40), 57-41, 60(41)-49, 87(87)-10, 24-68, 115(66)-8).

Ishpreet Singh Chadha, who has been competing in the pro snooker circuit in UK, defeated Railways' Pandurangaiah 4-1.

Ishpreet compiled sizeable breaks of 51 (1st frame), 84 (2nd), 105 (3rd) and 84 (5th) to complete a 81-9, 84-1, 115-4, 44-95, 84-25 win. —*PTI*

Real Madrid beats Atletico 2-1 in Champions League derby

MADRID, 5 MARCH

A superb goal from Brahim Diaz helped Real Madrid maintain its dominance of the Madrid derby on Europe's biggest stage with a 2-1 victory over bitter rival Atletico in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Tuesday.

Atletico has been beaten by the record 15-time European champion in both Champions League final matchups and has won only three of 11 meetings with their city rivals in UEFA competitions.

A tense encounter in the Spanish capital was decided by a moment of individual brilliance. Diaz scored the winner for Real Madrid after squeezing past a couple of Atletico players and curling a low strike into the far corner in the 55th minute.

Diego Simeone's team could not change the script after losing its finals to Madrid in 2014 and 2016. It was also eliminated the other two times they faced off in the knockout rounds — in 2015 quarterfinals and 2017 semifinals.—*PTI*

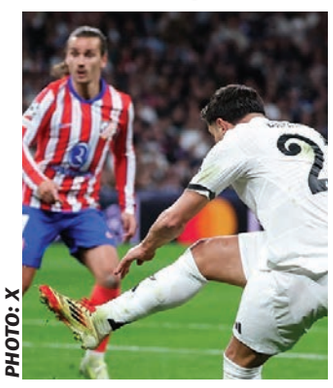


PHOTO: X

Serie A wants to hold a game in US

ROME, 5 MARCH

With nine of its 20 teams under American ownership, Serie A hopes to be the first major European soccer league to play a game in the United States, Italian league president Ezio Simonelli said Tuesday.

FIFA last year moved toward ending decades of soccer tradition by ordering a review of its policy that currently blocks domestic league games being played in other countries.

Simonelli was elected two months ago.

"This is a market that we count on a lot. We have nine clubs under American ownership and one Canadian, so I also need to thank them since they elected me," Simonelli said. "And we have other prospective buyers lined up."

The American owned clubs are: Atalanta, Fiorentina, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Parma, Roma, Venezia and Hellas Verona. Bologna is owned by a Canadian — Joey Saputo.

Serie A is also home to several U.S. standouts like Christian Pulisic (Milan), Weston McKennie (Juventus)

Serie A has held the Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia and other foreign countries for years. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

'RIGHT TIME TO STEP ASIDE'

Steve Smith bids adieu to ODIs after Australia's CT exit

DUBAI, 5 MARCH

Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith on Wednesday announced his retirement from ODI cricket following his team's four-wicket loss to India in the Champions Trophy semifinal here but the star batter will continue to play Tests and T20 Internationals.

The 35-year-old, who was leading the world champion side in the absence of an injured Pat Cummins, informed his teammates after the match that he would be stepping away from the 50-over format with immediate effect.

Reflecting on his decision, Smith said it was the right time to step aside as Australia builds itself for the 2027 ODI World Cup.

"It has been a great ride, and I have loved every minute of it," Smith said.

"There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories. Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic team-mates who shared the journey," he added in a media release shared by Cricket Australia.

A key member of Australia's victorious 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup-winning teams, Smith was named Australia's men's ODI Player of the Year in 2015 and 2021 and earned a place in the ICC men's ODI Team of the Year in 2015.

He took over the ODI captaincy in 2015 and, fittingly, led the side one last time in his final match.

The veteran of 170 ODIs said Test cricket remains a priority and he is looking forward to the World Test Championship Final in June —*PTI*

STEVE SMITH'S CAREER BREAKDOWN

OVERALL ODI STATS	CAPTAINCY RECORD	CHAMPIONS TROPHY RECORD
170: Matches	64: Matches	2nd-highest individual score by an Australian captain
5,800: Runs	32: Wins	105 (Tuesday's knock)
43.28: Average	28: Loss	Only behind Ricky Ponting's 111(115)* vs England (2009)
12: Centuries	2,270: Runs	
35: Half-centuries	43.65: Average	
	5: 100s | 14: Fifties	

ODI WORLD CUP TRIUMPHS

2015 WORLD CUP
- Top scorer for Australia (402 runs, Avg: 67)
- 1 Century | 4 Fifties | SR: 91.57

2023 WORLD CUP
- TChampions! Australia defeated India in the final
- 10: Matches
- 302: Runs (Avg: 33.55, 50s: 2)